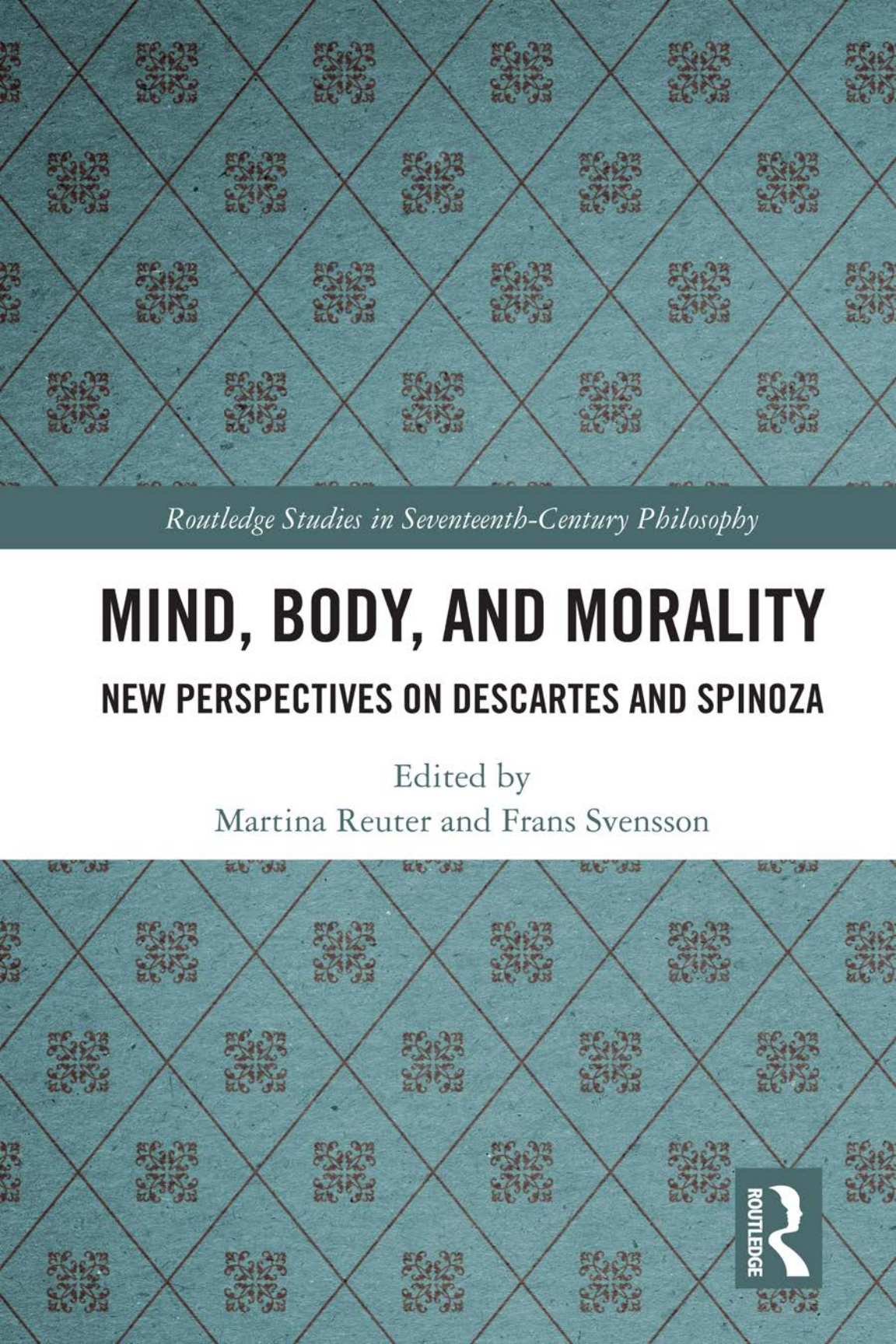
Routledge Studies in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy
MIND, BODY, AND MORALITY
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON DESCARTES AND SPINOZA
Edited by
Martina Reuter and Frans Svensson
ROUTLEDGE

Mind, Body, and Morality

The turn of the millennium has been marked by new developments in the study of early modern philosophy. In particular, the philosophy of René Descartes has been reinterpreted in a number of important and exciting ways, specifically concerning his work on the mind-body union, the connection between objective and formal reality, and his status as a moral philosopher. These fresh interpretations have coincided with a renewed interest in overlooked parts of the Cartesian corpus and a sustained focus on the similarities between Descartes' thought and the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza.

Mind, Body, and Morality consists of fifteen chapters written by scholars who have contributed significantly to the new turn in Descartes and Spinoza scholarship. The volume is divided into three parts. The first group of chapters examines different metaphysical and epistemological problems raised by the Cartesian mind-body union. Part II investigates Descartes' and Spinoza's understanding of the relations among ideas, knowledge, and reality. Special emphasis is placed on Spinoza's conception of the relation between activity and passivity. Finally, the last part explores different aspects of Descartes' moral philosophy, connecting his views to important predecessors such as Augustine and Pierre Abelard, and comparing them to Spinoza.

Martina Reuter is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Frans Svensson is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

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New Perspectives on Descartes and Spinoza

Edited by Martina Reuter and Frans Svensson

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Contributors

Lilli Alanen is Professor Emerita of History of Philosophy at Uppsala University. She specializes in early modern conceptions of mind, human agency, cognition, and passions, and has published numerous articles on Descartes, Spinoza, and Hume. She is the author of *Descartes*'s *Concept of Mind* (Harvard UP, 2003), and co-editor with Charlotte Witt of *Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy* (Springer, 2004). Her current work is on Spinoza on reason and perfection, and on a monograph on *Descartes's Moral Mind*. She is an elected member of a number of learned societies, including *Institut International de Philosophie* and the *American Academy of Arts and Sciences*.

Deborah Brown is a reader in philosophy at the University of Queensland and Director of the University of Queensland Critical Thinking Project. She has written extensively in the field of Early Modern Philosophy, particularly, on the philosophy of Descartes. Her 2006 book, *Descartes and the Passionate Mind*, was published by Cambridge University Press, and her forthcoming book, *Descartes and the Ontology of Everyday Life*, co-authored with Calvin G. Normore, is being published by Oxford University Press.

John Carriero is a professor of philosophy at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is author of *Between Two Worlds: A Reading of Descartes's "Meditations"* (Princeton UP, 2009) and co-editor with Janet Broughton of *A Companion to Descartes* (Blackwell, 2008). He has published extensively in seventeenth-century rationalism, especially on Spinoza.

Tomas Ekenberg is a docent of theoretical philosophy at Uppsala University. He specializes in early medieval ethics, metaphysics, action theory, and moral psychology and their origins in late ancient philosophy. He has published several articles on Anselm of Canterbury's and Augustine's thought and co-edited the anthology *Subjectivity and Selfhood in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy* (Springer, 2016).

Karolina Hübner is an associate professor at the University of Toronto, and author of several articles on Spinoza's philosophy.

Denis Kambouchner is Professor of History of Early Modern Philosophy at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University. His major publications are devoted to Descartes, including *L'Homme des passions. Commentaires sur Descartes* (Albin-Michel, 1995; 2 vols.); *Les Méditations Métaphysiques de Descartes* (PUF, 2005; vol. 1); *Descartes et la philosophie morale* (Hermann, 2008); *Descartes n'a pas dit* (Les Belle-Lettres, 2015). He is the chief editor of the new series of Descartes' *Complete Works* (Tel-Gallimard, in progress; 7 vols.). He has also published a number of studies on the modern problems of culture and education, including *L'école, question philosophique* (Fayard, 2013).

Olli Koistinen is a professor at the Department of Philosophy, University of Turku. He works mainly on early modern philosophy and has published papers on Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant. He has edited *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge UP, 2010) and (with John Biro) *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes* (Oxford UP, 2002). He also works on contemporary metaphysics, especially action theory, a subject on which he has published a monograph.

Peter Myrdal is a post-doctoral researcher at Uppsala University and a visiting scholar at the University of Turku. He works on metaphysics, theories of cognition, and ethics in early modern philosophy—in particular in Leibniz—on which he has published several papers.

Calvin G. Normore is Brian P. Copenhaver Professor of Philosophy at UCLA, William Macdonald Professor of Moral Philosophy (Emeritus) at McGill University and Honorary Professor at the University of Queensland. He studied at McGill and the University of Toronto (Ph.D. 1976) and was a Killam Post-doctoral Fellow at the University of Alberta and a Senior Fellow of the Society of Fellows at Columbia University. He has taught at Princeton University, the University of Toronto, and the Ohio State University and held visiting appointments at York University (Toronto), the University of California, Irvine, and Yale University. Normore is past president of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He works primarily in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy and is co-author (with Deborah Brown) of *Descartes and the Ontology of Everyday Life* forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Arto Repo is an independent scholar, affiliated with the University of Turku. He works on metaphysics and theories of cognition in early modern philosophy—in particular in Leibniz and Kant—on which he has published several papers.

Martina Reuter is a docent of philosophy and a senior lecturer in gender studies at the University of Jyväskylä. She has published articles and book chapters on Mary Wollstonecraft's moral philosophy, on Descartes and François Poulain de la Barre, on feminist interpretations of the history of philosophy, and on phenomenology.

Lisa Shapiro is a professor of philosophy at Simon Fraser University. Her research concerns the way early modern philosophers, such as Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, and Spinoza understand the role of the passions or emotions in cognition, as well as in early modern arguments for and accounts of education designed to develop thinking things. She is committed to rehabilitating the work of early modern women philosophers.

Frans Svensson is a senior lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Theory of Science, at the University of Gothenburg. He specializes in moral philosophy and the history of ethics.

Valtteri Viljanen is an Academy of Finland Research Fellow at the University of Turku. He is author of *Spinoza's Geometry of Power* (Cambridge UP, 2011) and numerous articles on Spinoza.

Mikko Yrjönsuuri is a professor of philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä. His interests are mainly in medieval and early modern philosophy. He has worked on a variety of themes, including logic and semantics, the mind and selfhood, and ethics and social theory. He chaired the commission translating Descartes' works into Finnish (4 vols.).

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Jyväskylä and Gothenburg, October 2018,
M.R. and F.S.

1 Introduction

Martina Reuter and Frans Svensson

In twentieth-century philosophy, René Descartes was generally considered a substance dualist, whose attempts to refute skepticism remained haunted by a metaphysics of the "ghost in the machine" and by an epistemology unable to reach past the "veil of ideas". This picture was guided by the century's own philosophical interests in questions of knowledge and certainty, and it dominated presentations of Descartes in introductions to the history of philosophy, as well as discussions of his views in advanced research in the philosophy of mind and in early modern philosophy.

Towards the turn of the millennium, however, this picture of Descartes' philosophy was seriously challenged. One of the game changers was Lilli Alanen's refutation of what she named the "Myth of the Cartesian Myth" (Alanen 1989, 1996, 2003). Alanen showed that Gilbert Ryle's claim about Cartesian persons as "ghosts in machines" was based on a misinterpretation. Descartes does not identify the person with an immaterial soul trapped in a mechanical body, but rather with the mind-body union, which he names a "primitive notion". Considered as a third primitive notion, the mind-body union gains independence to the extent that it cannot be reduced to either of the two primitive notions of thought and extended matter. Most scholars still agree, however, that it does not quite gain the independence of being a third substance and it remains far from clear what kind of metaphysical status that the third primitive notion should be granted and how it can be known.

Alanen approaches these questions from an epistemological point of view and argues that even though the mind-body union cannot be known with the same certainty as the mind or the body taken separately, it can be known as the locus of our daily experiences. In her criticism of Ryle's Cartesian myth, Alanen uses Ryle's own distinction between knowledge-that and knowledge-how and argues that the knowledge we can have of the mind-body union is characteristically of the latter, knowledge-how kind. The metaphysical questions involved here have been thoroughly discussed by Marleen Rozemond (1998), who examines the nature of Descartes' dualism and his notion of the mind-body union in relation

to positions defended in its seventeenth-century philosophical context. More recently, Deborah Brown has argued that the metaphysical nature of the mind-body union can best be understood by considering the dual nature of the passions, which consist in being both bodily processes and thoughts. She examines Descartes' reference to the actions in the body and passions in the soul as being *une mesme chose*, one and the same thing, and shows how this notion of identity helps him avoid an occasionalist understanding of the mind-body union (Brown 2006).

In addition to a vitalized interest in the Cartesian mind-body union, this new turn in Descartes scholarship has also raised and led to the reconsideration of several other philosophical questions. The rejection of Descartes as a "ghost in the machine" metaphysical dualist has gone hand in hand with a rejection of the claim that his epistemology cannot get beyond the "veil of ideas". Descartes distinguishes between ideas understood as thought-acts and ideas understood as the content of thoughts, and he claims that when understood in the latter sense an idea exists in the mind by its "objective reality". This objective reality is connected to a "formal reality", which is a causally prior and more perfect mode of existence and which causes objective existence in the mind.

Several scholars have investigated the connection between objective and formal reality and argued that Descartes is in fact not stuck with a conception of ideas as purely mental objects without any necessary relation to other modes of existence. This approach has involved taking into account Descartes' scholastic predecessors in order to explicate the terminology of objective and formal reality, and to understand exactly how he thinks that cognition is determined by reality. For example, John Carriero has convincingly argued that there is, in Descartes' view, a determination of structure, which connects ideas and reality. Carriero claims that "for Descartes, as for the Aristotelian tradition, ideas are best thought of as vehicles through which some reality or structure (i.e., some 'nature, or essence, or form') comes to exist in the mind and is made available to cognition" (Carriero 2009, 19; see also Normore 1986; Alanen 1994; Brown 2007).

Parallel with a focus on new philosophical topics recent scholarship has also started to pay serious attention to parts of the Cartesian corpus that used to be overlooked. When interpreting e.g. Descartes' *Meditations*, many philosophers have turned their attention away from the epistemological discussions in the First and Second Meditations to the discussion of free will in the Fourth Meditation and of the mind-body union in the Sixth. Reinterpretations of the *Meditations* have furthermore gone hand in hand with detailed studies of Descartes' last published work, *The Passions of the Soul*, and of his correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. These studies have focused on Descartes' psychology of the passions and also created a new interest in him as a moral philosopher.[1]

In their correspondence, Descartes and Elisabeth develop a moral philosophy where the Stoic overcoming of the passions is replaced with an attempt to refine the passions in order to constitute the basis of a virtuous and happy life. In addition to the passions, Cartesian moral philosophy stresses the freedom of the will and defines virtue as the correct use of free will. Passion and will are brought together in Descartes' notion of generosity. Generosity is simultaneously a pleasurable passion, felt when one realizes that one has used one's free will correctly, and a virtue, which by calming vicious passions acts as "the key to all the other virtues" (CSM 1, 388; AT 11, 454). Just as in the case of reinterpreting Descartes' concept of *idea*, the new interest in his understanding of free will has also generated important comparative studies of Descartes' position and the positions of Scholastic philosophers, particularly in the Augustinian and Scotist traditions.

By focusing on Descartes' correspondence with Elisabeth, recent Descartes scholarship has also contributed to the rediscovery of women philosophers of the early modern period, and to the attempt to integrate their works into the philosophical canon.[2] Taking for granted the view of Cartesian persons as "ghosts in machines", some feminist philosophers and theorists in the twentieth century criticized Descartes for radicalizing mind-body dualism and thus strengthening a hierarchy between male characteristics associated with the mind and female characteristics associated with the body (e.g. Bordo 1987). The recent focus on the role of embodiment in Descartes' philosophy has challenged this feminist interpretation and drawn attention to the beneficial consequences that Cartesian philosophy has had on early-modern as well as more recent conceptions of gender (e.g. Clarke 1999; Heinämaa 2004; Reuter 2004; Shapiro 2008b).

In addition to raising new philosophical questions, introducing new interpretations of familiar parts of Descartes' corpus, and generating close studies of not so familiar parts of that corpus, the recent turn in Descartes scholarship has also had a broader effect on interpretations of early modern philosophy. First and foremost, the fresh interest in the metaphysical and epistemological puzzles implied by Descartes' mind-body union has given rise to new perspectives on Baruch Spinoza's attempt to solve the problems that, in his view, result from Cartesian dualism. Whereas twentieth-century scholarship in early modern philosophy tended to focus on the differences between Descartes and Spinoza, contrasting the substance dualism of the former with the monism of the latter, recent scholarship has shown greater interest in the similarities, particularly in the similarities between the philosophical questions the two thinkers tried to answer.

Given that Spinoza is a rationalist who adopts the ontological framework of substances, attributes, and modes, it is no wonder that Descartes has come to be regarded as Spinoza's most important predecessor. Moreover, a growing interest in Descartes' theory of the passions—and

particularly in the therapeutic aspects of this theory—connects the two thinkers on a new level: after all, Spinoza is the early modern rationalist who develops an extremely systematic and thorough theory of human emotions to show us how to control our passions (James 1997; LeBuffe 2010; Kisner 2011; Kisner and Youpa [eds.] 2014). However, Spinoza's theory of the passions and of what he takes to be the ultimate end of his philosophy, namely human salvation, builds on a specific ontology of human existence; an ontology that involves a number of tenets concerning essences, powers, individuality, and activity. Much of the arguably most progressive current scholarship focuses precisely on these issues,[3] shedding new light on how finite human existence is to be understood in a system that so decidedly takes infinite divinity as its point of departure not only in the *Ethics* but also in earlier, previously less researched works.[4]

The present volume consists of fourteen chapters written by scholars who have contributed significantly to the new turn in Descartes and Spinoza scholarship outlined above. Here they present their most recent arguments. The volume is divided into three parts: the first focusing on different features of Cartesian persons; the second discussing different aspects of ideas, knowledge, and reality in Descartes and Spinoza; and the final part examining how the two philosophers conceptualize will, virtue, generosity, and love.

1. Cartesian Persons

The first part consists of three chapters, which examine different metaphysical and epistemological questions raised by the Cartesian notions of mind, body, and mind-body union. In the first chapter, Deborah Brown engages in a close dialogue with Lilli Alanen's interpretation of Descartes on mind-body unity. Brown asks whether Descartes' notion of mind-body unity belongs among his metaphysical notions or is to be viewed within the bounds of a purely phenomenological inquiry. Scholars tend in their treatments of this question towards one of two extremes, embracing either a strong metaphysical reading according to which the union is a third kind of substance or a wholly non-metaphysical perspective on the union. Brown rejects trialist interpretations of Descartes' account of the union, but argues for the view that not only does the union have a metaphysical status, it occupies a place of primacy in Descartes' philosophy. Following her interpretation of Alanen's position, Brown focuses on the union as a normative domain of inquiry, where questions of what we experience, of whether we should so experience and of how we should interpret our experiences come into play. In this reading, the metaphysical status of everyday experience comes into particular focus.

In the next chapter, Martina Reuter discusses the proto-feminist potential of Descartes' philosophy. She approaches the mind, the body,

and the mind-body union from an epistemological perspective and asks what can be known about gender through these three primitive notions respectively. In the first section Reuter examines how the primitive notion of the mind considered in itself strengthens the idea that "the mind has no sex", which we find already in Augustine and which was further developed within a Cartesian framework by François Poulain de la Barre. Next Reuter focuses on the notion of the body and analyzes what Descartes has to say about gender in his anatomical writings. Reuter is particularly interested in the little known posthumously published notes *Primae cogitationes circa generationem animalium*, where Descartes discusses the development of the fetus, including its gender. Here he assumes a difference between the native intelligence of men and women, which seems to contradict his claim that reason is equal in all humans, but Reuter argues that his views are reconcilable when we distinguish those modes of thought that depend on the mind alone from those that depend on the body. In the final section Reuter examines what we can know about gender through the notion of the mind-body union. She argues that when conceived as part of the union, the experience of gender is a hybrid of mind and body, which is irreducible to either the non-gendered mind or the body and its anatomical features. Reuter points out that it is particularly the irreducibility of the three primitive notions which contributes to the complexity of our understanding of what it is to be a gendered being.

Finally, Mikko Yrjönsuuri provides a new interpretation of Descartes' account of non-embodied vision, or of the experience of seeing at the early stage of the *Meditations*, when the meditator is in denial of having a body. Yrjönsuuri argues that Descartes' account must be seen in the light of traditional theories of vision where vision was taken to be a crucially bodily activity. If we accept that Descartes saw vision in the vein of his predecessors as a process that cannot take place without body, the relation of sensory perception to the mind needs to be re-evaluated. The same goes in fact for all bodily cognitive processes. Yrjönsuuri shows that even in sensory perception, the human distinction lies in judgemental responsibility in the evaluation of what the eyes see. In addition to the *Meditations*, his interpretation relies on the *Optics* and other minor texts where Descartes considers the way in which we judge distances on the basis of visual information given through the curved inner surface of the back of the eye. Yrjönsuuri draws the general conclusion that to have a mind, according to Descartes, is not primarily to be capable of passive experience, but to have genuine agency.

2. Ideas, Knowledge, and Reality

The second part consists of chapters by Peter Myrdal and Arto Repo, John Carriero, Olli Koistinen, Karolina Hübner, Lisa Shapiro, and

Valtteri Viljanen, who approach questions of ideas, knowledge, passions, and reality in Descartes and Spinoza. Myrdal and Repo begin by exploring some key issues within Descartes' theory of cognition and its vulnerability to the so-called "veil of ideas" problem. They take as their starting point the interpretation developed by John Carriero (2009), according to which Descartes is part of a tradition of theorizing about human cognition that starts from the idea that we are in principle capable of articulating or grasping the basic order of reality. One important element of Carriero's interpretation, Myrdal and Repo argue, is that Descartes' notion of idea is to be understood along the lines of the Aristotelian doctrine of formal identity between cognizer and cognized. While they are sympathetic to this new approach to Descartes, they argue that retaining the doctrine of formal identity faces some difficulties, given the novel conception of the structure of reality defended by Descartes. They propose that Descartes needs an alternative account of what it is for a cognizer to be determined by reality. Attending to some important differences between the innate ideas of extension and God, Myrdal and Repo conclude that Descartes may not have a fully worked-out account of his own. Considering some of the problems inherent in his view can, however, shed light on the, from our contemporary perspective, peculiar role both Spinoza and Leibniz give to God in accounting for cognition.

In chapter 6, Carriero examines the cognitive role Spinoza gives to the imagination and asks how it differs from the two higher forms of cognition, reason and intuition. He takes as his starting point some remarks made by Lilli Alanen (2011) to the effect that much of what is found at what Spinoza terms the lowest level of cognition—i.e., imagination—is "certain" and "beyond doubt". Some imaginative cognition would, it seems, count as knowledge in any ordinary sense of the term. How, then, do the two higher forms of cognition, reason and intuition, differ from imagination? Carriero argues that they differ in that the two higher forms of cognition involve essence and understanding. He explores Spinoza's conception of essence and understanding—and through that, the Spinozistic view of *scientia*—by reflecting on Spinoza's plenum physics. Special attention is given to how the logic of what Spinoza calls "common notions", based on invariance of structure, differs from a more traditional logic of universals, based on general kinds and particulars belonging to those kinds.

Next, Koistinen examines the question whether Spinoza, who explicitly criticizes Descartes on mind and body, offers a viable alternative to what he took Descartes' position to be. In the first section, Koistinen presents Spinoza's basic conception of causation which seems to lead to a rather strange position, parallelism, about the relationship between mind and body. In the second section, the aim is to show that Spinoza's philosophy of mind and especially his conception of the mind and ideas should be rethought. Koistinen argues that in Spinoza there is room for an infinity

of genuine thinking subjects which are not reducible to bundles of ideas. His reading may seem vulnerable to Karolina Hübner's forthcoming criticism of dependency readings of Spinoza, but Koistinen argues that Hübner's perceptive criticism does not, in the end, pose a problem for the interpretation that he defends. In the fourth section, Spinoza's view that ideas can be caused only by other ideas is given an alternative reading to those where ideas are seen as full-fledged modes causing other ideas on the model of causation in the extended world.

Hübner's own chapter argues that for Spinoza thought as such is inferential: to think is to grasp the consequences or implications of what is being represented. She shows that approaching Spinoza's epistemology through this inferential framework allows us to see many prima facie disparate epistemological doctrines—bearing on understanding, truth, adequacy, mental causality, and the difference between intellect and imagination—as part of a single, unified account. Finally, Hübner argues, a focus on inference illuminates what it means for ideas to enter into causal relations and thereby being able to mirror nature in the mind.

In chapters 9 and 10 Shapiro and Viljanen investigate different aspects of Spinoza's understanding of the relation between activity and passivity. One of the consequences of Spinoza's identification of God and nature is the problem of understanding if and how finite things such as human beings are to be distinguished from God. One way to tackle this problem is to try to identify who Spinoza takes to be *the thinking subject*, i.e. the thinker of the ideas Spinoza discusses in the *Ethics*. Shapiro examines the larger question of the status of the individual as it moves towards freedom from the bondage of the passions by examining the smaller and preliminary question of what it is for us individuals to represent ourselves. The chapter proceeds in three steps: Shapiro first looks at the primary affect of desire, which Spinoza initially defines as a consciousness of appetite, and elucidates in what this form of self-consciousness consists. In the second section Shapiro turns to pride and *acquiescientia in se ipso* and distinguish them as varieties of consciousness of self. Clarifying the distinction between these two raises further questions concerning the nature of the Spinozist individual subject: Is our own representation of ourselves sufficient to constitute us as individuals persisting over time? What happens to our self-representations as we learn more about Nature and situate ourselves within it? Are there limits to our abilities to represent ourselves as individuals? Addressing these questions, Shapiro argues, can shed light on the way towards freedom and to true *acquiescientia in se ipso* in Spinoza's philosophy.

The central goal in Spinoza's ethics is to express (as far as possible) our own essence in our actions, instead of letting them be dictated by one's passions. It is thus of crucial importance to have a clear grasp of how Spinoza understands activity and passivity. In his chapter, Viljanen takes a fresh look at the crucial second definition in the third part of the *Ethics*.

Here Spinoza states that: "we act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause", whereas we are passive "when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause". As scholars have pointed out, however, it is unclear how we can be an adequate cause of an effect *outside us*, which clearly seems to involve other causal factors as well. The definition of passivity is also problematic. A patient is said to be "only a partial cause" of the passion despite the fact that the passion "follows from" the patient's nature. This immediately raises the question: how can something follow from the patient's nature so that the patient can nevertheless be considered only a *partial* cause? Viljanen begins by outlining 3d2 and situating it in the historical context formed by Descartes, Hobbes, and the Aristotelian tradition. Then he shows that the existing interpretations of Spinoza's position do not solve the problem of activity and argue that unraveling the problem requires taking properly into account the distinction between immanent and transeunt causality. In relation to the definition of passivity, he argues that Spinoza's geometry-inspired theory of *essence constitution* offers the key to understanding the nature of passions.

3. Will, Virtue, and Love

The last part of the volume brings together chapters by Tomas Ekenberg, Calvin Normore, Frans Svensson, Denis Kambouchner, and Lilli Alanen, about different aspects of Descartes' and Spinoza's moral philosophies. In the first, Ekenberg offers a reading of the Fourth Mediation in the light of Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio*. Ekenberg argues that the volitionalist account of cognition that Descartes presents in the Fourth Meditation can be made sense of against the background of the theodicy in Augustine's work. If we read Descartes as sharing with Augustine (and the later medieval tradition) a certain teleological psychological framework, then we can help Descartes to respond to two common objections against volitionalist accounts of cognition: The first is an epistemological objection, according to which introducing the will in an account of judgment risks undermining the possibility of constructing a proper justificatory account of beliefs based on those judgments. The second is an empirical objection, according to which there seems to be ample evidence against our being able to believe any and all things at will. Ekenberg then considers various problems that his proposed reading gives rise to, including, for example, that Descartes himself in the introduction to the *Meditations* appears to object to interpreting the Fourth Meditation as involving discussions of morality, good, and evil, and also how his reading could be squared with Descartes' attempts to respond to Arnauld's challenges in the Replies.

Normore's and Svensson's chapters are thematically closely related. Normore argues that Descartes' conception of *generosity* in Part III of

The Passions of the Soul, published in 1649, constitutes Descartes' solution to an apparent tension in his earlier account of the highest good of each individual. In his letter of 20 November 1647 to the Queen Christina of Sweden, Descartes suggests that the highest good of each individual is constituted only by "a firm will to do well"—i.e. in a firm resolution in the will to act as well as one knows how—"and the contentment which this produces" (CSMK, 324; AT 5, 82). Since each person, in Descartes' view, is free to use her or his will well or badly, it seems as if the highest good of each person is here in each person's own power, and not dependent on fortune. But in a letter to Elisabeth (letter of 4 August 1645), Descartes rather suggests that if it is uninformed by right or correct reason, a firm resolution to act as well as one knows how can lead us to purse goods that are false, and in that case the contentment produced will not be solid. Here the highest good of each individual is, on the face of it, dependent on fortune: one's resolution to do the best one knows how need not always, it seems, result in one's doing what is *actually* best in the circumstances. In contrast to God, according to Descartes, we can never know for certain what the outcomes of our actions will be. So how, in Normore's view, does Cartesian generosity provide a solution to this conundrum? It does so, Normore argues, by entailing that the right or correct reason that must inform our firm resolution to do the best we know how, in order for that resolution to produce a contentment that is solid, is nothing but the insight that the firm and constant resolution to do the best we know how is *itself* what is right; that that is the only thing that is in our power, and therefore also the only thing worth aiming for in our conduct. Generosity cannot guarantee that we will acquire other goods as well. But it is sufficient for producing a solid contentment with what one has and what one does. Furthermore, while generosity, according to Normore, may not be as easy for some people to obtain as it is for others, it is nevertheless *possible* for each person to obtain.

Svensson, in turn, argues that we should distinguish between two forms of virtue in Descartes' ethics: between what Svensson calls *moral* virtue, on the one hand, and *perfect* virtue, on the other. The former consists merely in the correct use of free will, i.e. in "a firm and constant resolution [in the will] to carry out to the letter all the things which one judges to be best, and to employ all the power of one's mind in finding out what these are" (CSMK, 325; AT 5, 83), whereas perfect virtue consists in the combination of the correct use of free will and the knowledge that everything in our lives, with the exception of the use that we make of our free will, is determined for all eternity by Divine providence, and that the correct use of free will therefore guarantees that our lives will be as good or perfect overall as they can possibly be. In Svensson's reading, moral virtue constitutes the highest good of each individual, according to Descartes: it is the only good that is in each person's own power, and therefore also what each person ought to put up as the end or goal in all

of their conduct. But even though moral virtue is (at least in practice) necessary for living happily—or for enjoying a solid contentment with everything that one has and does—it is not sufficient for doing so. In addition, it is required that one has the knowledge that is part of perfect virtue. Perfect virtue *is* thus sufficient for living happily. However, since one's possession of the knowledge in question is, as all other goods besides moral virtue, not up to ourselves, perfect virtue—of which Cartesian generosity, according to Svensson, is one expression—is not in each person's own power. And neither, consequently, is happiness.

In the last two chapters of the volume, Kambouchner and Alanen examine Descartes' and Spinoza's views of love. Kambouchner devotes the first part of his chapter to showing that the view of love suggested by Spinoza at the end of the third part of the *Ethics* in fact comes much closer to the Cartesian view suggested in article 79 of *The Passions of the Soul* than scholars have usually recognized. He then proceeds to consider some of the possible differences that still remain between the two views. In particular, he pursues the following two questions: (1) Both Descartes and Spinoza make a distinction between two forms of love, *love as a passion* and *intellectual love*; but how could this distinction have the same sense for the two philosophers, given that for Descartes it is tied to the distinction between body and soul, which it is not for Spinoza? (2) Spinoza assimilates love to a form of joy, while Descartes considers love and joy as two different—even two primitive—passions; but how could one then identify Cartesian love with a Spinozian joy?

Alanen takes a new look at Descartes' notion of the mind-body union by discussing aspects of his moral psychology and ethics. In particular, the chapter discusses the role of the will in Descartes' account of passions, with a special focus on the case of love. Alanen offers a detailed examination of the Cartesian distinction between intellectual love and love as a passion, a distinction that is echoed in the one Spinoza makes between active and passive affects, and of Descartes' notion of joining oneself by will (or in volition) to the things that we love. She also shows how the examination of these things gives rise to important questions in relation to Descartes' view of the will, the self, and the mind-body union. Hereby the volume closes by turning back to some of the questions addressed by Deborah Brown in the first chapter.

Notes

1 See for example Marshall 1998; Brown 2006; Shapiro 2008a; Naaman-Zauderer 2010; Svensson 2015; Ragland 2016. (Further references can be found in e.g. Svensson's contribution to the present volume.)

2 On Elisabeth's contribution, see O'Neill 1999; Shapiro 1999; Tollefsen 1999; Broad 2002; Alanen 2004; and for a recent collection of essays on the contributions of several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women philosophers, see Broad and Detlefsen (eds.) 2017.

3 See e.g. Della Rocca 2008; Garrett 2009; Viljanen 2011; Alanen 2012; Marshall 2013; Hübner 2016, 2017.
4 Melamed (ed.) 2015 is a particularly notable example of the heightened interest in Spinoza's early works.

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Part I

Cartesian Persons

2 The Metaphysics of Cartesian Persons

Deborah Brown

What am I?
That's not a question anyone can answer.
What do you mean? Surely it's as good a question as "What is a banana?" or "What is a nose?"
What sorts of things do you *do*? I think we could answer that one.
I think, feel, sail boats . . .
Ah-hah! I can say that you are NOT a pilot in a ship!
But I just . . .
Ok, sometimes you are a pilot in a ship, but you are NEVER EVER a pilot in a ship in a ship.
I'm lost—how could we decide what I am not and yet never what I am?
To think, feel and sail boats you must have both a mind and a body, and mind and body cannot be understood within a single conceptual framework. So any single answer to the "What am I question?" inevitably leaves something out, and any plurality of answers is not going to make sense of the fact that in asking the question in the first place, you take yourself to be one thing, not many.
Damn right—it's not a committee in here you know! But is there really no one thing I could be?
Well, you are a *subject* of thinking, feeling, and movement. Does that help?
Not really. I may as well be a bunyip.
What's a bunyip?
That's the point—bunyips are nothing at all . . . [1]

"What is x?" (for any x) is the standard form of a metaphysical question. In Descartes' tree of knowledge, all branches of inquiry must be grounded in answers to questions of this kind. What is substance? What is the nature of mind and body and their distinction? What is motion? What is an idea? It is surprising then that when Descartes turns to the

subject of mind-body unity, there is a lot of, we might say, pussy-footing around on the question of what it is. He seems more interested in deflecting the question, offering, as the above fictional exchange suggests, only negative answers that tell us what the union is not. Above all, he tell us, it is not an *accidental* unity, but what it might be instead is unclear. This lack of a positive answer, coupled with his recommendation to Princess Elisabeth that she immerse herself in "ordinary life and conversation"[2] if she wants to learn more about the union, suggests a profound disinterest in analysing the union from a metaphysical point of view. Descartes' refusal to engage metaphysically with Elisabeth on the union is at odds, however, with his general explanatory strategy and poses a genuine threat to his dualism. In his tree of knowledge, all branches, including that of ethics or moral psychology, should be grounded in the metaphysics of substance. Yet, the fact that our experience is so thoroughly that of a single, unified subject makes our nature impossible to analyze in terms of Descartes's basic metaphysical categories, mind and body, and this in itself might seem sufficient to cast doubt on the very foundations of that philosophical system.

This chapter seeks to reduce the tension just described just enough for theoretical and practical purposes. There is an answer to the question of what the union is; it just isn't the same kind of answer that Descartes ordinarily gives to metaphysical questions. Extracting this answer requires a fair amount of reading between the lines—a suspicious enterprise, I admit, when interpreting a philosopher whose views are usually so literally exposed in the text. Still, it is important to give it a try. To ignore the question of what the union is, is to ignore not only what Descartes thought about human nature and our place in the universe, but to fail to understand something fundamental about the nature of the mind and its role in creating the forms of life so fundamental to human experience. It is not as if, in other words, one can address the other fundamental questions of Descartes' metaphysics having to do with mind and body without turning one's attention to the union.

It is particularly fitting in a volume honouring Professor Lilli Alanen to take up this challenge since she more than anyone else has steered us towards a better understanding of Descartes' account of the whole human being. For one thing, she has forced us to be clear about what exactly we are asking when we ask what kind of thing we are, and to see that, in general, metaphysical questions are never independent of the particular domains of inquiry in which they arise. The reference to "forms of life" in the last paragraph is deliberate. Experience, action, and social practice are the domains in which theorising about the union must proceed, and this, for Alanen, brings Descartes closer to Wittgenstein than anyone else, even Wittgenstein himself, has realised. The result is a deeply sympathetic and illuminating reading of Descartes' account of the human being and of the human condition.

I shall endeavour in what follows to set down the parameters of Alanen's reading and why it is significant. It is a reading that has developed over some thirty years from early papers on mind-body dualism (see her 1982, 1986, 1989) to later work specifically devoted to the union, including the game-changing article, "Reconsidering Descartes's Notion of Mind-Body Union," that appeared in 1996, her 2003 book, *Descartes's Concept of Mind*, and her more recent work on Cartesian composites and the place of the union in Descartes' science of nature (2008a, 2008b). While I shall focus on the metaphysics of the union, I do not see this as antagonistic to her project which focuses more on the phenomenology. There are metaphysical commitments at work in Alanen's own view, as she acknowledges in her adaptation of *liberal naturalism*, a term she borrows from John McDowell. I opt for a thicker metaphysics of the union, but we are both in agreement that some grounding is needed for the kind of phenomenology that she has so adeptly shown defines the union. Whatever the union is, it is no ordinary object of Cartesian metaphysics and its very extraordinariness requires a *sui generis* mode of discovery and method of classification. In what follows, I shall endeavour to develop one way in which that story might unfold, albeit consistent with Alanen's fundamental observations of the nature of the union.

1. Alanen on Mind-Body Unity

If we think of psychology as the natural discipline for investigating the embodied mind, Descartes' dualism, on Alanen's reading, has provoked two, competing conceptual frameworks for the study of psychology. One is a "nonmentalistic body psychology" (Alanen 2008a, 465) that understands mental phenomena in terms of "configurations and patterns of fluids in motion" (ibid. 472) that Descartes theorises are the proximate causes of all the thoughts we have that depend absolutely on the body. The other is a "rationalist, pure mind psychology" (ibid.), that, to quote Margaret Wilson (1978, 216), deals with "only one side of the (mind-body) equation"—the passions and sensations that are the mind's best evidence of its union with a body. The heir to the first of these paradigms is cognitive neuroscience, the search for the neural correlates of consciousness; the heir to the second, introspectionist psychology, the categorising of mental contents by first personal reports alone. These are legacies of a "too literal dualism" (Alanen 2008a, 465), neither of which does justice to the complexities of Descartes' account of mind-body unity.

Not even the fusion of these two approaches—a cognitive neuroscience guided in what correlations it looks for by first-personal reports—goes beyond the metaphor of the pilot in a ship that Descartes rejects. Nor does it go beyond the metaphor he would have rejected had he entertained it—Gilbert Ryle's "ghost in a machine."[3] Compare, Descartes surmises, a composite God might make of an angel and a body (AT 3, 492–93;

CSMK, 206). This composite could be so created that whenever damage to the body occurs, the angel forms an intellectual idea of this change, but feels nothing, no pain, for example. Neither of these composites—the angel + body nor the pilot + ship—represents a true mode of union. In each case, the relationship is characteristically one of ownership, whereas in the human being there is a direct identification by the subject with the body. I say "*I* am in pain" not merely "I *have* a body which is injured." The use of "I" to refer to the mind and the body as a single unified entity is characteristic of the phenomenology of the union.

These metaphors might, however, seem to be suggested by the fable of *L'Homme*, in which is conceived a body-machine as similar as it can be to a human body but one lacking a rational soul. Were God to place a "fountainkeeper" at the head of this otherwise functional body, it would, Descartes writes, create a "real human" (AT 11, 131; CSM 1, 101). Alanen denies, however, that this composite entity captures Descartes' mature conception of the human being. It describes rather "a machine with a rational control organ," not a person. "The union goes far beyond what any Platonic metaphors could capture" (Alanen 2008b, 426). I agree. We must exercise caution in reading too much into the fable of *L'Homme* since its point is not to describe what kind of thing the union is, but only to establish that the body has its own principles of organisation and operation, independently of the soul. With the exception of speech and rational action, the operations of the body can be explicated independently of any Aristotelian suppositions about the organising and executive functions of a rational soul.

How though does the union go beyond these Platonic metaphors? As Descartes makes clear to Arnauld, he does not want to fall into the trap of assuming that a human being is a rational soul that makes use of a body as if it were an instrument (AT 7, 81; CSM 2, 56). But the various ways in which Scholastic philosophers avoided that conclusion are not available to Descartes. One prominent solution was *hylomorphism*, according to which soul and body are one thing, each incomplete with respect to the other for existence. This was the view endorsed by Thomists. Alternatively, as the Scotists and Ockhamists argued, soul and body, although really distinct, are incomplete with respect to each other for their proper act. Without the body, the soul would suffer nothing, and without the soul, the body would be incapable of acting. Neither of these forms of metaphysical incompleteness is an option for Descartes.[4] He will at most admit to Arnauld that soul and body are "incomplete with respect to the union" (AT 7, 222; CSM 2, 156–57), which implies that each has a natural aptitude to unite with the other. But so what? In any composite, the parts have a natural aptitude for composition, otherwise, the composite would not exist. Something more has to be going on than that.[5]

It is at this point that Alanen's account of mind-body unity comes into its own. She draws attention to what is unique to Descartes' theorising

about the human composite. First, he reserves a sense of "nature" just for it alone. "My own particular nature" is neither the "nature" (essence) of Descartes' two substances, mind and body (thought and extension respectively), nor his general sense of nature: "God himself or the ordered system of created things" (Alanen 2008a, 465). My own particular nature can be subsumed neither under any of Descartes' official categories nor under his general philosophy of nature. As he declares to Elisabeth, it warrants its own "primitive notion" alongside the two categories of created substance, on the basis of which alone are we able to understand mind-body interaction:

> As regards the soul and the body together, we have only the notion of their union, on which depends our notion of the soul's power to move the body and the body's power to act on the soul and cause its sensations and passions.
>
> (AT 3, 665; CSMK, 218; Alanen 2008a, 466)

It is for this reason that causal interaction between mind and body cannot just be what *constitutes* the union; causal interaction is possible only *because* of the union. Descartes' assertion that the union has its own primitive notion is his clearest statement on what we already knew—viz., that the human being is irreducible to either notion of mind or body or their conjunction, since nothing about those notions entails what occurs when the two are combined by God into a union. Hence, the union must be studied according to *sui generis* principles of explanation.

The tension this creates for Descartes' dualism is obvious. As Alanen eloquently puts it, his dualism is "an unstable fruit of compromises" (2008a, 470). He admits to Elisabeth that it is impossible to think of how something can be two and one at the same moment. So she should avoid asking questions about the union in terms that imply she is really thinking about mind-body distinction. She should rather immerse herself in that "ordinary life and conversation" mentioned earlier to best understand her particular nature as a human being. The union is known best and with certainty only through the senses, and only obscurely through the intellect or intellect combined with imagination. As a subject of unique, sensory modes, the union is best known through these modes.

Following Henri Gouhier (1962), Alanen reads Descartes' emphasis on the sensory ways of knowing the union as endorsing a "pre-philosophical" notion of unity; grasping the union in much the same way in which we grasp something without knowing how we do it.[6] We have "know how" without knowing how we have such know how. (There is no meta-know-how here.) The pre-philosophical understanding of the union comes into play when we act in the world, especially, when we *socially* interact. It is no accident that Descartes refers, in his letter to Elisabeth of June 28, 1863, to "conversation" as one of the primary activities through which

we learn about the union (AT 2, 692; CSMK, 227). The discovery of the union does not reflect the "interior" perspective of the meditator, but a deliberately *exterior*, outward-looking perspective, suggesting that, for Descartes, the "person" to be discovered is constituted as much by her social interactions as by the interaction of her mind and body. This observation agrees with the story developed in *The Passions of the Soul*, as Alanen (2003, chap. 6) argues in her book, *Descartes' Concept of Mind*. There, she shows how our individual psychologies are constructed through the course of our lives by our particular experiences, our actions, others' reactions, and the struggle to locate the Archimedean point in every moral being—the discovery that nothing truly belongs to us except the freedom of the will and the resolve to use it well.

Taking "substance" and "subject" (of predication) as interchangeable, and thus conflating "substance" as it appears both in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and his *Categories*, some commentators have insisted that the union must be understood to be a third kind of substance (Hoffman 1986, 1999, 2008; Schmaltz 1992; Skirry 2001, 2005). Alanen urges us, correctly in my view, to resist this inference. Descartes never himself draws this conclusion and adds no third principal attribute to his official attributes of thought and extension. Since every substance has its own principal attribute, this is a glaring omission if he intends the union to be a substance. At *Principles of Philosophy* I, 53, Descartes (AT 8A, 25; CSM 1, 210) writes that "to each substance, there belongs one principal attribute . . ." and proceeds to mention only the principal attributes of mind (thought) and body (extension) and how all other modes of substances depend on these two. Alanen (2008a, 470–71) notes, moreover, that if we insist on a single, principal attribute for the union, we miss something fundamental, namely, that the union is the subject of a necessary "attribute dualism." The modes that characterise the union (sensations, passions, and volitions to move the body) can only be understood *simultaneously* through the attributes of thought and extension—duality and singularity coming together, after all. The modes of the union are "states of mind and body at once" (Alanen, ibid), a point undermined by occasionalist readings of Descartes that would reduce the singularity of the phenomenon to the duality of regular, God-instituted correlations. Action and passion, Descartes insists, are "*une mesme chose*" (AT 11, 328; CSM 1, 328), even when the action is in the body and the passion is in the soul, or vice versa. One and the same affective experience, when referred to the body, is an action—a movement of the animal spirits—and when referred to the soul, a passion—a way the soul is affected (e.g., by love, joy, anger, or so on). However this is to be understood, it is not something that can be captured within an occasionalist paradigm. It might seem as if this very unification of modes across substances undermines Descartes' dualism, but there are ways for him to easily avoid this conclusion. Since modes are accidental to a substance, any interdependence of

modes across substances is no barrier to the separability or real distinction of the substances themselves (Hoffman 1990; Brown 2006, 128).

If Alanen is right, we *need* Descartes' dualism, at least the duality of attributes, to understand the phenomenon of mind-body unity. Only this will prevent us from being tempted to study the union from one or another myopic perspective—either that of rationalist psychology or mechanistic psychophysiology—and prevent our thinking that if we just amass enough facts from "both sides of the equation," we will exhaust the conception of mind-body unity.

What would such investigations leave out, you may ask? If the phenomena that are distinctive of the union consist in psychophysical realities that are instituted by God, why can we not just use our best science and our regulated experience to uncover the psychophysical laws that sustain that union? I say "regulated" experience because the typical modes of the union are confused and obscure, and Descartes makes no attempt to define such modes on introspective grounds alone. But herein lies the rub. It takes a fair amount of empirical work to classify the modes of experience that ground the union. Sensations and passions are taxonomised according to their "first causes" (reminiscent of the "formal objects" of Scholastic theories of the passions); by their neurological correlates (movements of the animal spirits); by how they are "referred" (either to the body, to external things or, in the case of the passions, to the soul itself);[7] by their relationship to judgement; and by their effects on behaviour and action.

All this can be known empirically, but why isn't it, therefore, part of Descartes' regular philosophy of nature? Here, again, Alanen makes a major contribution to our thinking about the union. Borrowing the "anomalous" part of Donald Davidson's (1980, 213) "anomalous monism," Alanen hypothesises that Descartes' is an "anomalous dualism." There can be no "positive psycho-physiology of lawful correlations between kinds of mental states and bodily states, each of which can be described only in mutually independent and irreducible terms" (Alanen 2003, 72; see also 2008a, 483). There are indeed regularities connecting sensations and passions with neurological events, and regularities that connect sensations and passions with typical kinds of behaviour. Neither kind of regularity can, however, be subsumed under strict laws. Descartes' primary goal in *The Passions of the Soul* is to define the passions as "functions of the needs and ends of the human being as a mind-body union, and the principles of classification take this union as their starting point" (Alanen 2003, 73). But, according to Alanen, Descartes is more interested in the *practical* role the passions play in our moral life than articulating any set of psychophysical laws. If the project falls at all within the purview of *scientia* for Descartes, it is a far cry from the model of metaphysical certainty based on intuition and demonstration that he usually operates with. The most anyone can hope for is moral certainty—*sapientia*—"cognitions that have pragmatic value though they are less

than fully certain" (Alanen 2003, 73). We should not, therefore, infer from Descartes' positing a third primitive notion in addition to mind and body that there is a corresponding third kind of knowledge or a method for obtaining truth that is different in kind from his established demonstrative method. This much we can know with the moral certainty that experience provides.

But given the inevitable obscurity of our ideas, why suppose that we even have moral certainty in the case of truths involving the union? The short answer is that no sensation can be known in isolation. The longer answer is that there are many things that undermine the possibility of finding bridging laws between the physical and the mental, even if the natural institution of the union ensures a correspondence between types of movements of animal spirits and types of immediate effects upon the soul—correlations between the *first* and *second* grades of sensory response (AT 7, 436–37; CSM 2, 294). These immediate effects (second grade) are not to be confused with the cognitive state as a whole. Sensations and passions involve an intellectual element, which in the Sixth Replies, Descartes (AT 7, 437; CSM 2, 295) refers to as a "judgement" and "the third grade of sensory response." This suggests a certain fluidity to what meaning the soul attaches to the impressions it receives on the basis of sensory stimulation. Second, and relatedly, his approach is much more *holistic* than psychophysicalism about mind-body correlations would allow. Which ideas an individual forms on the basis of the movements of their animal spirits is as much a matter of the habits formed through their individual life histories as the correlations between movements of the animal spirits and the effects of those movements upon the soul (Alanen 2008a, 483). Being jaded and disposed to reserving my energy for more important battles, I am likely to dismiss a patronising remark by a colleague with a bemused eye roll, whereas you, my passionate, morally upright, junior colleague are outraged. There is nothing in the general physiology of the human being or the natural institution of the union that will enable us to predict, without taking into consideration individual histories, temperaments, or the forms of life in which we are each engaged, what each of us would experience given exactly the same stimulus conditions. If generalities emerge, they will not take the form of psychophysical regularities, but as patterns of response to a broad base of conditions, some internal (bodily and temperamental) and some external (environmental and contextual, including a range of proximate and distal causes). The theoretical framework in which such generalities can be observed and understood is moral psychology not psychophysicalism.

The union is above all else, for Alanen, a *normative* domain of inquiry, where questions not just about *how* we react to the circumstances of life but whether we *should* so react come into play. In such a "space of reasons," to borrow Wilfred Sellars' expression, psychophysical laws gain no traction. We have to look to common sense, to our personal

histories, to the social and political unions in which we participate and without which we could not live, not only to understand ourselves as unions of mind and body, but to classify the very modes that prevent the union from being reductively analyzed in terms of the dual categories of substance. We see the problem starkly in Descartes' analysis of his own desire for women with squints, which he discovers cannot be understood solely in terms of its proximal causes in the brain. He must instead foray into his own personal history, and when he does, the desire is imbued with new significance. When pathologised, the desire comes to be seen not as tracking desirable qualities but as projecting them, and in the process of discovery, loses much of its original force. As Descartes writes in the letter to Princess Elisabeth of June 6, 1647:

> I now pass to your question about the reasons which often impel us to love one person rather than another before we know their worth. I can discover two, one belonging to the mind and one to the body. The one in the mind presupposes too many things concerning the nature of our souls which I would not dare to try to explain in a letter; so I will speak only of the one in the body. It consists in the arrangement of the parts of our brain which is produced by objects of the senses or by some other cause. The objects which strike our senses move parts of our brain by means of the nerves, and there make as it were folds, which undo themselves when the object ceases to operate; but afterwards the place where they were made has a tendency to be folded again in the same manner by another object resembling even incompletely the original object. For instance, when I was a child I loved a little girl of my own age who had a slight squint. The impression made by sight in my brain when I looked at her cross-eyes became so closely connected to the simultaneous impression which aroused in me the passion of love that for a long time afterwards when I saw persons with a squint I felt a special inclination to love them simply because they had that defect.
>
> (AT 4, 56–57; CSMK, 322)

The process described is a kind of transference. What is interesting for our purposes is how this example serves as an example of the kind of *holism* of which Alanen (2008a, 472–73) speaks—that is, how real life contexts, social and political environments, family ties, business engagements, and individual histories "structure and color how [persons] are affected and react." It is the richness and complexity of our immersion in ordinary life that prevents any neat psychophysical reduction of the union. There is nothing spooky about this approach. In Brown (2006, 3), I described the experience of the union as a kind of *phenomenological monism*—an experience *as if* one were a single substance, even if one is in fact composed of two. Alanen's *phenomenological holism* enriches this

idea, making explicit the interconnections between experiences, behaviour, and action that ground the experience of unity. There is nothing in this idea which is inconsistent with naturalism. Borrowing McDowellian terminology, Alanen (2008a, 480) insists that her view constitutes a kind of *liberal naturalism*, one that accepts the nuances and norms of daily life as part of what it is to develop knowledge of the union. The habits and patterns of affective and behavioural response that constitute "my particular nature" are akin, she will say if you ask her, to the Aristotelian idea of "second nature." It had become second nature to Descartes to find himself drawn to women with squints. This nature was as real to him as his nature as a thinking and embodied being, and worthy of investigation.

Alanen's phenomenological approach is a form of naturalism, therefore, to the extent that there is nothing unnatural or supernatural about recognising how one's childhood pleasures shape one's future expectations and current desires, or how individual histories inform one's experience as an embodied mind. It is a *phenomenological* approach in the most comprehensive sense of the term, going beyond mere descriptions of the *phenomenality* or *what-it's-likeness* of sensory experience, which would yield data only about one side of the mind-body equation. Her phenomenology requires us to attend to the connections between our sensations, passions, volitions, and the web of thoughts, actions, and behaviours that imbue them with meaning, and without which they would not be what they are.

This is what Descartes' "teachings of nature" are all about. If I ignore hunger or thirst, I shall become weak. These sensory or affective experiences are encoded through their relations to certain kinds of thoughts (of food and water), to memories and past associations, and to certain kinds of actions or behaviour (obtaining food or water; eating or drinking). Such connections can, on occasion, become destabilised—e.g., in the case of dropsy, which is a "true error of (my) nature" (AT 7, 85; CSM 2, 59)—but here too I learn the necessity of correcting what I have learned from nature, learning instead when not to trust a sensation that triggers a certain train of thought (the desire to drink) and certain actions (drinking) (Alanen 2008b, 432–33). Where would the concepts of *correction*, or *trust*, which, Alanen (2008a, 474) points out, allude to the essential teleology of the human condition, find a place within Descartes' mechanistic, non-teleological philosophy of nature? Nowhere. And thus she concludes that the investigation of the union must proceed through common sense, moral education, and moral psychology, which is more or less what Descartes recommends to Elisabeth.

2. Metaphysical Musings

The emphasis on the unique modes of explanation that the union evokes, the necessity of drawing upon Descartes' attribute dualism to understand

what is unique to the union, and the proposal that phenomenological holism is the most fruitful paradigm in which to theorise about the union, constitute the way in which Alanen's work has shaped subsequent thinking about the union. Her careful reflections on the experience of embodiment present, moreover, a challenge to any more "restrictive" form of naturalism about the mind. If she is right about the essentially holistic and normative nature of the mind and its experience in this life, the prospects of mind-brain correlations, let alone reduction, are nil. But what of our original question? Does this mean that the subject of mind-body union must inevitably swing free of his tree of knowledge, like some airborne parasitic fern looking for a home? And can we say nothing about what the union is?

Addressing a slightly different but related worry—viz., how to make sense of Descartes' schizophrenic identifications in the Sixth Meditation of "the whole self" (*me totum*) *both* with the thinking thing of the Second Meditation and with the union, "the totality of things bestowed upon me by God" (AT 7, 80; CSM 2, 56) of the Sixth—I have argued that Descartes is not addressing a single question (*What am I?*) but two. These are *What am I?*—answer: I am essentially a thinking thing—and *Who am I?*—answer: I am a union of mind and body, or, we would say, a *person*.[8] Some may say that this reduces the schizophrenia in the way that one reduces a wrinkle in a carpet in one place by pushing it to another, but I don't think so. We cannot in whatever we say about how Descartes is thinking of the self, ignore the fact that he seeks at least to accommodate the possibility of personal survival after the death of the body (even though he never attempts to prove it), and to remain in good standing with Church orthodoxy. The former requires a basis for identification of the *I* (*ego*) with the rational soul, while the latter forces him to acknowledge that the rational soul is the form of the body.[9] How can a Cartesian (or any one for that matter) admit both of these claims?

Descartes' most metaphysical pronouncements about the union occur in his correspondence with Henricus Regius over the Utrecht affair. A self-proclaimed disciple of Descartes, Regius had provoked the rectors by claiming that the soul is only accidentally joined to the body, forming with it an *ens per accidens*. "You could scarcely have said anything more objectionable and provocative," Descartes writes (AT 3, 460; CSMK, 200), and what proceeds is a vain attempt to help Regius out of the hot water he, and, inadvertently, Descartes, is in (AT 3, 460; CSMK, 200). He points to a distinction between *coming to be accidentally*, and *being accidentally*, insisting that the former does not entail the latter. A mouse that spontaneously forms from dirt *comes to be accidentally* but is not *an accidental unity* (like a heap or a composite of substance and accident—*Peter standing*). The mouse is rather an *ens per se*, a thing with *being through itself*. In this case of the mouse, it has being as a whole, unified animal. So too, although God could have made our rational soul without

our body, the union is an *ens per se* not an *ens per accidens*. Descartes advises Regius, moreover, to assert that he upholds other metaphysical and orthodox commitments, which he should do because they are true. These include that the rational soul is the "true substantial form of the body" (AT 3, 492–93; CSMK, 206), indeed, the only substantial form in being separable from the body and yet forming with it one thing (one "substantial union"). These comments comply with Descartes' assertion in the Sixth Replies that while the union is not a *unity of nature*, it is a *unity of composition* (AT 7, 423–24; CSM 2, 285–86). In a unity of composition the parts can only be understood in relation to the whole just as the flesh and bones of an animal need to be understood *qua* flesh and bones through their relationship to the whole animal of which they are parts. The unity of composition of an animal is here offered as a model for understanding the unity of a human being and for understanding those features of the mind and body that cannot be understood alone but only by reference to the whole of which they are essential parts.

In noting the tension between Descartes' dualism and his account of mind-body unity, Alanen (2008a, 470) describes three interpretative options that have appeared in the literature:

1. Accept substance dualism and let the union go (as an entity with its own criteria of identity)
2. Accept both and live with the inconsistency in Descartes' philosophy
3. Recognise the problematic nature of dualism and the argument for it while taking seriously the notion of the union.

Alanen's own sympathies are close to the third option, although not without qualification. She seeks not to reconcile his dualism and account of mind-body unity, but to supplant it with a rich phenomenological approach that gives us everything we ought to want by way of an explanation. The virtue of her account is that it shows how an understanding of human experience requires distinguishing between the mental and bodily conditions of experience without conflating the two. Only in this way will we attain any conceptual clarity about the union to the extent that it is possible to do so. Unpacking our experience as embodied beings reveals the intimate and defining interrelations between what is in the mind (e.g. a sensation of thirst) and what is without (e.g. the nervous stimulation that evokes the sensation, the subsequent act of drinking, hydrating the body, etc.) The nature of these interconnections exposes the soul to essentially normative, teleological, and holistic criteria of interpretation. "*What is thirst?*" lends itself to the question *When is it appropriate to drink?* (If one is dropsic, the answer will be "*Not now!*") None of these facts about the union can be absorbed easily into either Descartes' mechanics or his metaphysics of matter. The normative criteria that answer the "why" questions—*Why do we feel pain, thirst, desire, etc?*—never

suffice as answers to the "what" questions—e.g., "*What makes a combination of essentially distinct substances, mind and body, one thing?*" But there is, I want to suggest, a fourth interpretative option, one which might shed some light on Descartes' metaphysical musings while remaining faithful to the general direction in which Alanen's excellent study has taken us.

The fourth option requires us to take seriously not just the fact that Descartes postulates a mind-body unity while we accept that mind and body are distinct and basic units of his metaphysics, but to see that, in general, he is working with different conceptions of metaphysical unity besides the unity of substance. To be precise, we should acknowledge that the notions of *substance* and *subject* (of predication) are not co-extensive. To be a subject requires unity but there are unities that, while they might be composed of substances, do not qualify as substances themselves. These include arrangements of matter that "arise from the potentiality of matter" (AT 3, 505; CSMK, 208) and are corruptible, and yet exhibit a degree of structural integrity that enables them to withstand replacement of the substantial parts of extension of which they are, at any one time, composed. Automata, both natural (animals) and artificial (clocks, windmills, and fountains), exhibit persistence conditions that are distinct from those of the matter which, at any given time, composes them. As noted above, these "unities of composition," like the unity of flesh and bones in a living animal, are the model on which Descartes intends us to understand the kind of unity exhibited by the whole human being. Each is a corruptible kind of thing, which, by the criteria cited in the *Synopsis* to the *Meditations* (AT 7, 14; CSM 2, 10), excludes each from being a substance.

These are ideas that Calvin Normore and I explore in our forthcoming book, *Descartes' Ontology of Everyday Life*. As we see it, Descartes applies his mereological thinking across a number of domains—in thinking about animals and automata, in thinking about the functional integrity of the human body, in thinking about couples, families, and nation-states and in thinking about mind-body unity. These are wholes that are in some sense more than the sum of their parts. There are properties and causal powers of the whole that emerge from the special arrangement of the parts, which are found neither in the parts nor in the parts arranged differently. Only the whole horse gallops and it gallops by virtue of the special arrangement of its parts, and for reasons such as these, it is fitting to say that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. While it may seem to make sense to say that the legs gallop—and perhaps in an uncoordinated horse, some legs could be more engaged in galloping than others[10]—it is more appropriate to say that the horse as a whole gallops *with* its legs than that the legs gallop, for it is hard to imagine the legs on their own or in any other arrangement achieving this feat of motion. The mind-body union is in some ways similar to the union of an automaton;

in some ways, not. It is perhaps the paradigm of a single-yet-composite subject—a subject of unique modes of predication, unique forms of activity, causal powers, and forms of life. The union includes among its components a mind, however, in virtue of which it is able to engage in forms of life that are inconceivable for automata (at least according to Descartes). Only the human being as a whole can be conscious of the changes occurring to it through its interaction with the natural and social environment, and respond deliberately and voluntarily. Only the union of mind and body is able to experience passions, sensations, and proprioception, and intentionally move matter within and through its body.

Considering the union as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts reduces the tension between Descartes' dualism and the unity of the human being because the independence of parts is not threatened by the irreducibility of the whole they compose. What it does mean, however, is that questions about what is *basic* in Descartes' ontology must be taken to be moot. Whatever is a bearer of unique and irreducible properties is basic to the kind of explanation required, regardless of whether the bearer is a substance in itself or relates to the category of substance only through its components. This is no less than what a robust acceptance of the idea of unities other than substances demands.

To see why this must be so consider how the union is not the only entity for which Descartes reserves a special sense of "nature." Any "nature" should count as basic to Descartes' metaphysics, and "nature" is a genus that encompasses several species: nature in general, individual substances, and composites, both general ("true and immutable") and individual ("my particular nature"). In developing the doctrine of animal automatism, Descartes considers the possibility of artificial life, noting that:

> I made special efforts [in the Traité de l'Homme] to show that if any such machines had the organs and outward shape of a monkey or of some other animal that lacks reason, we should have no means of knowing that they did not possess *entirely the same nature as these animals*.
>
> (AT 6, 56; CSM 1, 139; my emphasis)

The sense of "nature" deployed here is neither the nature of a substance nor "general nature," but a sense specific to animals. In general, automata are treated as special in nature—they grow, meaning that they cannot be identified with any particular chunk of extension. And they are the subjects of unique, emergent properties—only the cow as a whole chews cud, nurses her calf, moos, and so on. But now we can see that their explanation also requires something like the holism Alanen cites as crucial to the definitive functions of the human being. Chewing cud and nursing calves are activities that have to be understood holistically, taking into account

the cow's history, her relationship to her environment, and others of her species. These are also essentially *dynamic* phenomena—nothing chews cud at an instant—and so cannot be reduced to a collection of the static properties of the extended substances that compose the cow at any given time (or even the collection of all her static properties through time.) Descartes denies that physiological explanation requires either normativity or teleology—there are no final causes or ends in non-human nature (AT 7, 55; CSM 2, 38–39)—but his physiology requires a more holistic mode of explanation than his physics. If we want to understand what happens when the cow falls off the roof, we do not need to think about the cow as an integrated system of organic parts or in terms of her place in her species, but only in terms of her mass and speed and the laws governing her imminent collision with the ground. But when we want to know why she chews her cud or nurses her calf, or even why she went up to the roof in the first place, new and distinctive modes of explanation are required. Descartes clearly thinks that what happens at the microphysical level is relevant to explaining what happens organically, but there is no suggestion that organic descriptions could be replaced by microphysical ones or that they do not capture something real, an *ens per se* (Brown 2012).

We should think in much the same way about the union. We can, to some extent, reverse engineer a human being, unpacking the processes of thought and motions of the spirits that collaboratively ensure the environmental success of this "best design possible." When Descartes says in *The Passions of the Soul* that he will approach the passions "*en physicien*," we should not, as Alanen warns, think that he is offering to reduce the passions to the physical side of the mind-body equation. The physicist's approach to the passions includes attending to their "first" (i.e. external) causes, their history, their symptoms and behavioural effects, and their meaning, as well as the force and impact of rapidly moving animal spirits as they carve channels in the soft and spongy parts of the developing brain. It is these channels that establish the temperament of an individual, shaping its dispositions towards certain kinds of passionate responses and judgements about the utility or disutility of things thereafter, and in a way that takes considerable ingenuity and retraining to undo. Reverse engineering the union, to the extent that that is possible, does not imply that one could forward engineer a human being from a knowledge of mechanics and understanding of the essence of the mind.

So is there a metaphysics of the union? There is if we accept that Descartes' account of wholes and parts is such that there can be wholes that are not reducible to the sum of their parts, the test for which is whether the whole is the subject of unique modes of predication (Brown 2014). One can agree with John Carriero (2009, 400) that sensation is not constitutive of the union but rather a *proprium* (necessary property) of it. It is, however, *the* proprium that signals the irreducibility of the union. The union is the paradigm example of Descartes' commitment to ontological

emergence—its passions and sensations are modes the soul can experience only when it exists in union with a body—and it is this commitment that underwrites his claim that the union is an entity "in its own right":

> If the reason for calling [certain substances] incomplete is that they are unable to exist on their own, then I confess I find it self-contradictory that they should be called substances, that is, things which subsist on their own, and at the same time incomplete, that is, not possessing the power to subsist on their own. It is also possible to call a substance incomplete in the sense that, although it has nothing incomplete about it qua substance, it is incomplete insofar as it is referred to some substance in conjunction with which it forms something which is a unity in its own right. . . . The mind and the body are incomplete substances when they are referred to a human being which together they make up. But if they are considered on their own they are complete.
>
> (AT 7, 222; CSM 2, 156-7)

Far from being at odds with Alanen's phenomenological interpretation of the union, a metaphysical picture such as this is required to make sense of what kind of subject could be the subject of the unique modes that are captured in the phenomenology of the union. The tight integration of cognitive and mechanistic functions that characterise the union as a composite structure underwrite her observations of the importance of attribute dualism in the phenomenology of the union. The mereological approach advanced here allows, moreover, that the union inevitably becomes embedded in larger unions that exhibit analogously reciprocal relations among their parts, so aptly captured by the idea of a "body politic." Through love, in particular, according to Descartes, we willingly form unions with others—couples, families, societies, nation-states, and the whole earth (AT 4, 293; CSMK, 266)—and by "considering ourselves as parts of some other body, we share in the goods which are common to its members" (AT 4, 308; CSMK, 269). In pursuing this theme, Descartes writes to Chanut (February 1, 1647):

> I make a distinction between the love which is purely intellectual or rational and the love which is a passion. The first, in my view, consists simply in the fact that when our soul perceives some present or absent good, which it judges to be fitting for itself, it joins itself to it willingly, that is to say, it considers itself and the good in question as forming two parts of a single whole.
>
> (AT 4, 601; CSMK, 306)

In that same letter, Descartes describes the love the soul has for the body as being among its first thoughts, suggesting that the tendency of the soul to conceive of itself as part of a larger, more valuable whole is a feature of

the nature of the embodied soul from its very first moments of consciousness. The disposition to identify oneself as part of larger wholes continues throughout one's life, and, Descartes suggests, beyond it as well. We are naturally inclined to seek union with God, and when we love God, we "consider ourselves in relation to God as a minute part of all the immensity of the created universe" (AT 4, 610; CSMK, 310).

It is the existence of these social and moral superstructures that explain the need for the holistic and teleological forms of explanation of the human condition that Alanen so thoughtfully describes. Without them we could not explain the generosity and self-sacrifice of others, such as that of the good father, whom Descartes describes as conceiving of himself as the lesser part of the whole he forms with his children:

> For he imagines (*se representant*) that he and they together form a whole of which he is not the better part, and so he often puts their interests before his own and is not afraid of sacrificing himself in order to save them.
>
> (AT 11, 389; CSM 1, 357)

It is difficult to see how such thoughts and behaviour could be understood just by reference to the mind and its intrinsic nature. The union is the condition for participation in social and moral forms of life, not an accidental by-product of mind-body interactions.

3. Conclusion

Once a much neglected subject of scholarly interest, Descartes' account of mind-body unity is now a burgeoning industry. As one of the first to think through the complexities of this account and to develop an intricate understanding of what the phenomenology of the union presupposes, Alanen continues to inspire generations of scholars to take the union seriously. By demonstrating the rich phenomenology that characterises the union, connecting passions, sensations, thoughts, judgements, actions, and behaviour, Alanen has moved us beyond thinking that Descartes' philosophy of human nature is stuck behind a veil of ideas—one side of the mind-body equation—to an understanding of interdependent, integrated mental and physical processes. One can reasonably think of her work as having performed a kind of transcendental deduction on Descartes, uncovering the worldly, physiological, and social preconditions for our affective and sensory experience, as Descartes himself describes it. We learn from her that the scientific study of human experience and human behaviour—what would now be encompassed under *psychology*—requires essentially normative, historical, and holistic modes of explanation. These things we should hold dear whether we are interested in Descartes as a historical figure or in more general questions

concerning how best to approach psychological inquiry. We should, for example, be suspicious of research programmes interested exclusively in mind-brain correlations that do not take into consideration the holistic constraints on human development and the human experience. And we should embrace such constraints in the knowledge that complexity is what makes us the unique and ultimately interesting subjects of investigation that we are.[11]

Notes

1 In Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime stories, the bunyip is a mythological creature whose nature is not entirely clear. In Jenny Wagner and Ron Brook's children's book *The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek* (1973), a bunyip searches for answers to the "What am I?" question only to be told again and again that bunyips don't exist and so are nothing. In the end, it is only an encounter with another bunyip that makes answering the question possible. Who we are is who we are with others who reflect our natures back to us—a fitting theme for the present study.

2 More precisely, Descartes writes in the letter of June 28, 1643, that "it is the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditation and from the study of things which exercise the imagination, that teaches us how to conceive the union of the soul and the body." (AT 2, 692; CSMK, 227)

3 See Alanen (1996) for a critique of Ryle's influential approach to the Cartesian mind.

4 See Rozemond (1998, sections 5.2 and 5.3) for a detailed comparison between the Scholastics' and Descartes' treatment of the incompleteness of mind and body. As Rozemond makes clear, while the Scholastics had their own problems accounting for the unity of the human being, Descartes' commitment to the metaphysical completeness of mind and body makes the problem particularly acute and blocks the path to hylomorphic solutions.

5 It is largely for this reason that so many scholars have been dismissive of Descartes' treatment of the union. Vere Chappell (1994) and Margaret Wilson (1978) dissolve the union into nothing more than the causal interaction of mind and body made possible by the natural institution of God. Wilson (1978, 216) thus objects that talk about a "true substantial union" is disingenuous, as does Daisie Radner (1971), who dismisses it as incoherent since it postulates one nature composed of two essences. Descartes is only incoherent, however, if the only sense of "nature" is that equivalent to "essence," which, as Alanen (2008a, 2008b) has shown, is not the case. "Nature" has multiple meanings, as its use in denoting the union and other composites makes clear.

6 Epistemologically and methodologically, as both Alanen and John Carriero (2009, 396–401) point out, the nature of the union is obscure. That it is known "clearly" but not "distinctly" by the senses, and is known clearly neither by the intellect nor the imagination (AT 2, 692; CSMK, 227), represents something of a departure from Descartes' usual method of acquiring truth. Up until the end of the Fifth Meditation, in order to know *that* there is a true and immutable nature of x, I have to have a clear *and* distinct idea of x. While Descartes might be seen as allowing that clear perception is sufficient for knowing *that* something exists, it seems reasonable to doubt that clear perception is a sufficient guide to the *nature* of a thing. And yet the senses are supposed to reveal to me the "true mode of union," as Descartes (AT 3, 492–93; CSMK, 206) explains to Regius. Despite the fact that pain is clearly

present to the mind, I might still be disposed to judge falsely as to what kind of mode it is, where it is located and what its proximal causes are. As Alanen (2003, 66) points out, clarity is a matter of an idea's being "present and accessible to the attentive mind." For an idea to be distinct, however, it must be "so separated and delineated from all others that it contains absolutely nothing except what is clear," and Descartes' usual method is to rely on an idea's distinctness to obtain perfect knowledge (*scientia*) about it. See *Principles of Philosophy* I, 45 (CSM 1, 207). Differences between sensations might *indicate* differences within the surface properties of the bodies we encounter, but this is insufficient to elevate sensations to being part of the scientific image of nature. As Carriero (2009, 396–401) points out, the role of the senses in the union can only be understood against the background of the cognitive agent's interest in the wellbeing of the body. The union must, therefore, be understood within this teleological framework.

7 In Brown (2006, 100–104) and Brown and Normore (2003), the different ways in which sensations and passions are "referred" is shown to correspond to the different ways in which sensory terms are predicated of things.

8 See Brown 2014.

9 See Brown and Normore (Forthcoming, chap. 6) for a more detailed discussion of the theological pressures Descartes was under.

10 I thank Martina Reuter, a fine horsewoman, for this astute observation!

11 I am very grateful to Lilli Alanen for her friendship, the many fruitful exchanges about Descartes over the years, and for her excellent feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter. I am also very grateful to Martina Reuter for excellent comments, and to her, Frans Svensson, and Harry Alanen, for their skill and dedication in producing this volume.

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3 The Gender of the Cartesian Mind, Body, and Mind-Body Union

Martina Reuter

In her first known letter to Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia famously asks him to specify "how the soul of a human being (it being only a thinking substance) can determine the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary actions" (AT 3, 661; S, 62). Descartes answers by distinguishing between three primitive notions, pertaining respectively to the soul or mind, the body, and the mind-body union and he emphasizes that "all human knowledge consists only in distinguishing well these notions, and in attributing each of them only to those things to which it pertains" (AT 3, 665–66; S, 65). Descartes' primitive notions did not satisfy Elisabeth (e.g. AT 4, 2; S, 72), but despite their limitations when it comes to explaining mind-body interaction, the three notions, and particularly the separate notion pertaining to the mind-body union, does help us understand how Descartes perceives of our lives as embodied individuals and has attained well deserved attention in recent research.[1]

In this chapter I take Descartes' distinction between the three primitive notions as my starting point and ask what we can know about gender when we focus respectively on the notion of the mind, the notion of the body, and the notion of the mind-body union.[2] I will follow Descartes' advice and keep the three notions separate, and I hope to show that his contribution to our understanding of gender lies exactly in showing that depending on which notion we choose, we achieve different kinds of knowledge, which cannot be reduced to each other.

Gender is not a term used by Descartes and his contemporaries. In his brief discussion of reproduction in *Description du corps humain*, Descartes refers to "les semances des deux sexes" (AT 11, 253) and in *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (1673), the Cartesian François Poulain de la Barre argues that "l'espirit n'a point de sexe" (Poulain 2011, 99). In these texts all bodily, social and mental relations between men and women are described as relations between "des deux sexes" and I will follow the praxis to translate the French *sexe* with the English sex when I discuss particular passages from the texts, but when abstracting from particular texts I use gender as a general term covering all

bodily, experiential, and social aspects of our lives as women and men. I have chosen this terminology because in twenty-first-century English the term "sex" has increasingly come to mean only biological features of gender.[3]

First, in section 1, I examine what we can know about gender through the notion of thought, pertaining to the mind alone. The section begins with a brief summary of pre-Cartesian views on whether the soul is gendered. In section 2, I focus on the primitive notion of body and examine Descartes' treatment of gender in his anatomical writings. Finally, in section 3, I discuss what we can know about gender when it is examined through the third primitive notion of the mind-body union.

1. The Mind Has No Sex

The idea that women and men have similar rational souls can be traced to Plato's famous discussion in *The Republic* V (454d-456b) and the idea has been a theological commonplace since Augustine, who grounds it in the doctrine of creation.[4] Augustine formulates the point in the following words:

> No one doubts that the human being was made in the image of Him who created this being, not according to the body, nor according to any part of the soul, but according to the rational mind, wherein the knowledge of God can exist. The image of God does not remain except in the part of the soul in which it clings to the eternal reasons which it may contemplate and consider [. . .] and this, it is clear, not men only, but also women have.
>
> (*De trinitate* XII.7.12; cited from Reuter, Grahn, and Paakkinen 2014, 650)

Despite bodily differences and the effects these differences have on the lives of men and women—not least on women's position in society—both sexes have the same capacity to contemplate eternal reasons and to know God. The doctrine is taken up by Thomas Aquinas, who writes that "The image of God, in the principal sense of the image, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman" (*Summa theologiae* I.93.4, ad 1; cited from Reuter, Grahn, and Paakkinen 2014, 652). But though Aquinas holds on to the idea that men and women share the same intellectual nature, he puts much emphasis on the imperfection of women's corporeal nature, which makes them inclined to be led by their emotions rather than their reason. He writes:

> [Aristotle] gives the example of women in whom, for the most part, reason flourishes but little because of the imperfection of corporal nature. Because of this they do not govern their emotions by reason

> but rather are mostly led by their emotions. For this reason wise and brave women are rarely found, and so they cannot be called continent and incontinent without qualification.
>
> (*Sententia libri Ethicorum* VII.5, n9; cited from Reuter, Grahn, and Paakkinen 2014, 652)

Here women are portrayed as on average inferior to men particularly in their practical reasoning, even though they have equal intellects including an equal ability to know God. The reason is their imperfect corporeal nature. Aquinas attributes this view to Aristotle, who claims in *Parts of Animals* (748a2–14) that the hot, thin, and pure blood of men is from a normative point of view better than the colder blood of women because it correlates with courage and practical wisdom.[5]

During the Renaissance, Thomism provided arguments for both sides in the *querelle des femmes* (debate over the worth of women), and in Descartes' own time the claim that the intellect has no sex was given a feminist Thomistic articulation by Marie le Jars de Gournay in her treatise *Égalité des hommes et des femmes* (1622). She writes:

> [T]he human animal, when it is understood correctly, is neither man nor woman, the sexes having been made double, not simply, but *secundum quid*, to use Scholastic language, for the sake of propagation alone. The unique form and differentiation of that animal consists only in the human soul.
>
> (Gournay 2002, 978)[6]

Here Gournay makes two important claims. First, she emphasizes that the difference between the sexes is not an essential difference in species, but only an accidental difference. Second, she emphasizes that the accidental difference is only for propagation and that there is thus no reason to suppose that it affects the rational soul, which is the unique form of a human being.[7]

Descartes never explicitly discussed whether the mind has a sex, but right at the beginning of *Discourse de la Méthode* he emphasizes that "the power of judging well and of distinguishing the true from false—which is what we properly call 'good sense' or 'reason'—is naturally equal in all men" (AT 6, 2; CSM 1, 111) and it is quite clear from the context as well as most of his other writings[8] that he is here using "homme" in the generic sense including women. Descartes repeated praise for Elisabeth's intellectual abilities, made public in the dedicatory letter prefacing *Principia Philosophiae* (AT 8, 1–3; CSM 1, 190–91), indicate that he did not recognize any principal differences between the intellectual abilities of men and women.

So, how can we according to Descartes know with certainty that reason is equal in all human beings? In order to answer this question we

must focus on the notion of thought, which pertains to the soul when it is perceived on its own. In the Second Meditation, where Descartes examines his own nature as a thinking thing, he writes: "But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions" (AT 7, 28; CSM 2, 19). All these modes of thought belong to me as a thinking thing, but whereas the "fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is so evident that I see no way of making it any clearer", sensory perceptions belong to me only insofar as I "*seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed".[9] The existence of bodily things and their properties, such as light, noise, and heat, is still under doubt, but sensory perceptions, when understood in "this restricted sense of the term [. . .] is simply thinking" (AT 7, 29; CSM 2, 19) and as such certainly belong to me as a thinking thing. At this point Descartes could have added that he *seems* to be gendered.

At the beginning of the Sixth Meditation Descartes returns to the question of the difference between the will and the pure understanding, which depend on the mind alone, and the imagination which "seems to be nothing else but an application of the cognitive faculty to a body which is intimately present to it" (AT 7, 72; CSM 2, 50). He explains that:

> [T]his power of imagining, which is in me, differing as it does from the power of understanding, is not a necessary constituent of my own essence, that is, of the essence of my mind. For if I lacked it, I should undoubtedly remain the same individual as I now am; from which it seems to follow that it depends on something distinct from myself.
>
> (AT 7, 73; CSM 2, 51)

Descartes' argument is not very clear, but he seems to claim that the imagination depends on bodies both in the sense that it has bodies as its objects and in the sense that "if there does exist some body to which the mind is so joined that it can apply itself to contemplate it, as it were, whenever it pleases, then it may possibly be this very body that enables me to imagine corporeal things" (AT 7, 73; CSM 2, 51). Thus, the mind has to be joined to a body in order to be able to imagine other bodies. At this point Descartes has not yet shown that bodies exist, but he has shown that "they are capable of existing, in so far as they are the subject-matter of pure mathematics, since [he perceives] them clearly and distinctly" (AT 7, 71; CSM 2, 50). God is capable of creating what can be clearly and distinctly perceived. This potential existence of bodies is, according to Descartes, enough to show that the imagination depends on something else in addition to the mind taken on its own. The same is true for sense perception, by which we are able to perceive not only the mathematical characteristics of bodies, but also "colours, sounds, tastes, pain and so on" (AT 7, 74; CSM 2, 51).

I now turn back to the topic of gender and want to claim that from Descartes' point of view, gender, like the imagination and sensory perception, cannot be thought of without reference to a body. When we perceive the mind as distinct from the body, gender is thus, like the imagination and sensory perception, an accidental property, which "is not a necessary constituent [. . .] of the essence of my mind" (AT 7, 73; CSM 2, 51). The non-gendered character of the mind is, further, something the pure understanding perceives clearly and distinctly. In *Principia* Descartes writes that "we can easily have two clear and distinct notions or ideas, one of created thinking substance and the other of corporeal substance, provided we are careful to distinguish all the attributes of thought from the attributes of extension" (AT 8, 25–26; CSM 1, 211). When applying this claim to the question of gender, we can draw the conclusion, that when carefully distinguishing the attributes of thought, such as the will and the pure understanding, from attributes of extension—to which gender belongs—we can have a clear and distinct idea of ourselves as non-gendered thinking beings.

Finally we can also apply the distinction between the three primitive notions to the question of whether the mind has a sex. From Descartes' emphasis that we are mistaken "when we want to explain some difficulty by means of a notion which does nor pertain to it" as well as "when we want to explain one of these notions by another" (AT 3, 666; S, 65) follows that it is a mistake to explain those modes of thought that belong to the mind alone by bodily features such as gender.

Interpreted in this way Descartes strengthens the doctrine that the mind has no sex. We saw above how Gournay, in her Aristotelian-Thomistic framework, argued that gender is an accidental property, and we can claim that the Cartesian notion of the mind as a thinking thing distinct from the body strengthens the claim about the accidental nature of gender.[10] The Cartesian approach was taken up and explicitly applied to the question of gender by Poulain de la Barre in his treatise on the equality between the sexes.[11] When the Cartesian method is correctly applied, it is, according to Poulain, "easy to see that the difference between the two sexes is limited to the body, since that is the only part used in the reproduction of humankind". In true Cartesian manner Poulain adds that "the mind is found to be equal and of the same nature in all men" when it is "[c]onsidered independently" (Poullain 2002, 82).

Descartes did, I claim, successfully provide the tools to show that when the mind is considered on its own it is non-gendered, but this argument is not in itself sufficient to refute the claim that women's bodily constitution affects their intellectual capacity. We have to return to that question in the context of the mind-body union, and before that we need to look at some length at what we can know about gender when we consider the body as a separate extended entity.

2. Gender and Formation of the Human Body

In his second letter to Elisabeth, when he elaborates on the difference between the three primitive notions, Descartes writes that "the body, that is to say, extension, shapes, and motions, can [. . .] be known by the understanding alone, but is much better known by the understanding aided by the imagination" (AT 3, 691; S, 69). Geometry and physics constitute the exemplary forms of knowledge about bodies, and, as is well known, Descartes attempts to use these forms of knowledge also in his explanations of living bodies and their generation.[12] In a letter to Mersenne from 20 February 1639, he writes that he has "spent much time on dissection during the last eleven years", but "found nothing whose formation seems inexplicable by natural causes" (AT 2, 525; CSMK, 134), and in the posthumously published *Description du corps humain* he includes conception and generation among the phenomena that can be explained by such causes. I quote this passage at some length, since it is one of the very few places where Descartes explicitly discusses the relations between the sexes. He writes:

> I specify nothing concerning the shape and the arrangement of the particles of the seed: it is enough for me to say that that of plants, being hard and solid, can have its parts arranged and situated in a particular way which cannot be altered without making them useless. But the situation in the case of seed in animals and humans is quite different, for this is quite fluid and is usually produced in the copulation between the two sexes, being, it seems an unorganised mixture of two liquids, which act on each other like a kind of yeast, heating one another so that some of the particles acquire the same degree of agitation as fire, expanding and pressing on the others, and in this way putting them gradually into the state required for the formation of parts of the body.
>
> And these two liquids need not be very different from one another for this purpose. For, just as we can observe how old dough can make new dough swell, and how the scum formed on beer is able to serve as yeast for making more beer, so we can easily agree that the seeds of the two sexes, when mixed together, serve as yeast to one another.
>
> (AT 11, 253; G, 186–87)

Descartes continues by explaining how the heat generated through this process makes "some of the particles to collect in a part of the space containing them, and then makes them expand, pressing against the others" (AT 11, 254; G, 187). This is how he explains the differentiation of the organs, beginning with the formation of the heart.

Descartes does not discuss the differentiation of male and female foetuses in *Description du corps humain*, but in some notes published as *Primae cogitationes circa generationem animalium* he makes a few remarks on the topic. The passage I want to discuss is not only posthumously published, but particularly unauthorized, because the editor of Descartes' *Opuscula Posthuma* (1701), where *Primae cogitationes* first appeared in print, tells us that it was erased in the manuscript (AT 11, 515). But even if Descartes (or someone else) was ultimately unsatisfied with this explanatory attempt and erased it, it deserves attention when we want to understand Descartes' thoughts on the gendered body.[13] The passage is troubling also because contrary to what Descartes indicates in his published writings, he here claims that the anatomical differentiation of male and female foetuses gives occasion to conclude why "men are more natively intelligent (*ingeniosi*)" (AT 11, 516). This is so because male foetuses are located in the womb in such a way that "the purest part of semen is able to pass higher up and thus gain more strength" (AT 11, 516). The location of the foetus also explains whether the penis develops outwards, as in the male, which is located with his back against his mother's spine, or inwards, as in the female foetus, which is located in the opposite direction (AT 11, 516).[14] It is important to note that Descartes is pointing at a correspondence between the sexual organ and intelligence: the same location of the foetus which favours the development of the male sexual organ also favours the development of intelligence. He is not claiming that there is any causal relation between the male sex and a more developed intelligence.

Before accusing Descartes for contradicting his view on everyone's equal capacity of reason, we need to keep in mind that in *Primae cogitationes* he is explicitly discussing anatomical features and *ingenium* refers exclusively to modes of thought that depend on the body, such as the imagination and memory, not to the pure understanding or the will, which depend on the mind alone. Interestingly, in the dedicatory letter to Elisabeth that prefaces *Principia*, Descartes praises both the resolution of her will, which is less remarkable since it is "within the capacity of everyone" and "the outstanding and incomparable sharpness of [her] native intelligence (*ingenii*)" which is "obvious from the penetrating examination [she has] made of all the secrets of [the] sciences, and from the fact that [she has] acquired an exact knowledge of them in in so short a time" (AT 8, 3; CSM 1, 191–92). Scientific knowledge, such as geometry and physics, depends on the imagination as a well as the pure understanding. The dedicatory letter and *Primae cogitationes* both include modes of thought that depend on the body, such as the imagination, under the notion of *ingenium*, but in the dedicatory letter Descartes claims that at least one woman is more intelligent than most men. When we think of exceptional individuals, such as Elisabeth, in the light of Descartes'

anatomical and physiological writings we have to ask how their foetal development differed from that of ordinary people: perhaps the location of the foetus has been exceptionally beneficial for the development of those anatomical features required for an ingenious imagination and a particularly detailed memory. Since these cases are exceptional, we can think that they may occur in both sexes even if the ordinary anatomical development has the consequence that most women tend to be less intelligent than most men, as is claimed in *Primae cogitationes* (AT 11, 516).

When interpreting Descartes' view on the native intelligence of men and women, we must give the published dedicatory letter to Elisabeth more authority than his unpublished and even erased primary thoughts on the development of the foetus. The dedicatory letter is particularly interesting because Descartes praises Elisabeth's intelligence, which is able to shine despite "the customary education that so often condemns young ladies to ignorance" (AT 8, 3; CSM 1, 191), thus indicating that if women show less ability, this can be due to education rather than lack in native capacities. But it is still wise, I think, not to use the dedicatory letter as evidence against *Primae cogitationes*, but rather to acknowledge that the passages are compatible and both refer to *ingenium* as a native intellectual capacity, which includes the bodily capacities of imagination and memory, and which shows individual variation. This capacity must be distinguished from the "power of judging well [. . .] or 'reason' (*raison*)" (AT 6, 2; CSM 1, 111) of the *Discours*. The latter capacity belongs to the mind perceived on its own, it is natively equal in all humans, and, most importantly, all differences are differences in how well judgement or reason is applied. To judge or reason well is something we learn, most importantly by following Descartes' method, which should be used by Scholastic doctors and young ladies alike, in order to overcome their particular forms of ignorance. The equal power of judgement or reason is also in the opening passages of the *Discours* separated from a "quick [. . .] wit, [a] sharp and distinct [. . .] imagination, [and an] ample or prompt [. . .] memory" (AT 6, 2; CSM 1, 111–12). These are capacities that show individual variation and which are in the Latin texts considered part of the bodily grounded *ingenium*. In this and the previous section, where I have been discussing the mind and the body separately, it is important to keep the purely mental capacity of reason and the bodily grounded capacity of *ingenium* separate, but I will come back to the question of their relation in the next section, when I discuss the mind-body union.

Despite its questionable authority, the passage in *Primae cogitationes* is important because it illustrates Descartes' attempt to explain sexual differentiation by what he calls natural causes. Seen as empirical descriptions, the accounts are indeed imaginative and highly speculative, but I want to claim that they must be seen as hypotheses rather than as verified descriptions.[15] Descartes is aware that his account of generation is

not based solely on what we would call empirical observations. In *Primae cogitationes*, when he discusses the initial expansion of the semen, a process which is claimed to depend on heat, just as in the *Description*, he points out that the question whether the initial process of expansion takes "one or two days, perhaps only one hour" is "a factual question (*quaestio facti*)" which cannot be "solved by reason" (AT 11, 510). This remark strengthens the impression that Descartes is formulating a hypothesis, which he thinks still has to be tested. As many commentators have emphasized, Descartes did engage in detailed anatomical observations, including dissections of animal embryos,[16] but these dissections were necessarily "still pictures". Even when Descartes was able to compare the development of organs in embryos of different age, these observations could not capture the actual processes of development. In order to describe these processes, Descartes uses reason and the imagination, and his emphasis on the location of the foetus must, I think, be seen in the framework of his hypothetical thinking. If we know the location of a foetus and the principles of its growth, then we are on more or less geometrical terms able to formulate a hypothesis of its development, but this hypothesis still needs to be tested against anatomical findings. Descartes was optimistic concerning the possibility to explain generation by natural causes, but we also know that he was reluctant to publish his anatomical writings (at least in part) because he thought that he had not yet "had the resources to make all the observations [he] should need in order to back up and justify [his] arguments" (AT 9, 17; CSM 1, 188), as he explains in the preface to the French translation of *Principia*. Descartes' unpublished primary thoughts on the differentiation of the sexes is best read, I think, as his untested hypothesis and it is valuable because it tells us what kind of explanatory model he is looking for.

The first and foremost natural cause used in order to explain the development of the foetus is heat, which Descartes describes as the very fast motion of particles (AT 11, 7–10; CSM 1, 83–84). In addition there is location and density, which are both related to the arrangement of particles. All these belong to the attributes of bodies, which are in Descartes' second letter to Elisabeth exemplified as "extension, shapes, and motions" and which can be best known by "the understanding aided by the imagination" (AT 3, 691; S, 69). Interestingly, we can note that contrary to what is the case with the seed of plants, where the rearrangement of the particles destroys the function of the seed, this is not the case with the seed of animals, where the proper function depends on heat—and thus on motion—rather than on the arrangement of particles.[17] This means that the differentiation of the sexes cannot be found in the seed, which is "an unorganised mixture of two liquids" (AT 11, 253; G, 187). Descartes emphasizes the similarity of male and female seed in *Description du corps humain* as well as in *Primae cogitationes*, where he writes that "the semen of both parents" must be "simultaneously mixed" in order to

produce successful generation (AT 11, 507). Descartes interestingly adds that the semen from both parents has to be equally strong, because if the semen from either parent is "so weak that it easily and without major resistance mixes and surrenders to the other" there is no generation of an animal but only of a tumour (AT 11, 508). By claiming that equal strength is required from the seed of both parents, Descartes emphasizes their equal role in generation.

Descartes' account of generation is significantly different from the Aristotelian account, and this difference is essential when we want to understand how Descartes' conception of gender as a trait of extended bodies differs from earlier accounts. In the *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle writes:

> [T]he male and the female are distinguished by a certain capacity and incapacity, for the one who is able to concoct and form and ejaculate semen and who has the principle of the form is the male. [. . .] That which receives but is incapable of both forming and ejaculating is female.
>
> (*Gen. an.* 765b9–15)

In her interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of the biological difference between men and women, Marguerite Deslauriers identifies two main features: first, Aristotle distinguishes between the male ability to fully concoct semen and the female's merely partial ability, and second, he holds that "the male has the principle of the form, which determines the shape and the functions of the offspring" (Deslauriers 2009, 216).[18] It is easy to see how Descartes alters both features. First, his claim about similarity, and particularly about the similar strength of the male and female semen, undermines the idea that there is a difference between the male and female abilities to concoct, and second, his location-based mechanical explanation of the differentiation and development of the human organs attempts to make any determining principle of form unnecessary.

Aristotle's and Descartes' accounts both rely on heat as fundamental for generation, but they understand the nature of heat and its role in generation differently. In Aristotle there is a "principle of natural heat" which is directly connected to the capacity of concoction and different in males and females (*Gen. an.* 4.1 766a31–36; Deslauriers 2009, 217–18). According to Descartes, on the other hand, heat is explained on purely physical terms as the fast movement of particles (AT 11, 7–10; CSM 1, 83–84). From his perspective Aristotle's principle of natural heat is one of the obscure real qualities that physics must get rid of. In a letter to Mersenne, Descartes argues that "[h]eat, sound, and other such qualities [. . .] are only motions in the air" and "motion is not a *real quality* but only a *mode*" (AT 3, 649–50; CSMK, 217). By emphasizing that heat is mere motion and that motion itself is only a mode of extension,

Descartes undermines the possibility of a principle of natural heat, which is different in males and females and produce a qualitative difference in the male and female semen. The idea that heat is a mere mode does further strengthen the accidental nature of the differentiation of the sexes. The gender of the foetus is arbitrarily determined, depending on its location in the womb.

Descartes' mechanistic model does undermine the Aristotelian idea about qualitative differences between the sexes, but, as we have seen, his model does not exclude the possibility that there are anatomical differences between the sexes and that some differences can influence native intelligence. From Descartes onwards the question of intellectual difference or similarity between the sexes becomes an empirical question focusing on *ingenium* and other bodily conditions for thought. Among his followers we find those who, like Poulain de la Barre, argued that "a woman's brain is exactly the same as ours" (2002, 83), and those who, like Nicholas Malebranche, emphasized the difference in the delicacy in the brain fibres in men and women (1997, 130–31).[19] As we know, the discussion of whether there are cognitively significant empirical differences between the brains of men and women is still going on at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and there does not seem to be any easy empirical answer to the question.

Having now seen what we can know about gender when it is studied with the help of Descartes' second primitive notion, pertaining to the body alone, and leaving the resulting empirical questions unsolved, we now turn our attention to the third primitive notion, pertaining to the mind-body union.

3. The Gendered Mind-Body Union

To my knowledge, the only description of gendered experience connected to Descartes' corpus is Elisabeth's remark in a letter of 24 May 1645. She writes:

> I have a body imbued with a large part of the weaknesses of my sex, so that it is affected very easily by the afflictions of the soul and has none of the strength to bring itself back into line, as it is of a temperament subject to obstructions and resting in an air which contributes strongly to this.
>
> (AT 4, 208; S, 88–89)

Descartes does not comment on Elisabeth's reference to female weakness, but much of the discussion that follows in subsequent letters focuses on the mind's—and particularly the will's—ability to overcome and even restore bodily disturbances. I will come back to this discussion, but before that I examine what can be said about gendered experience from the

point of view of what Descartes has to say about bodily sensations. If we look at Elisabeth's reference to the weakness of her sex as a description of a bodily sensation, we can (without overlooking significant difference between these experiences) compare it to Descartes' discussions of the sensation of pain. In *Principia* Descartes uses pain as an example showing that a perception can be clear without being distinct. He writes:

> [W]hen someone feels an intense pain, the perception he has of it is indeed very clear, but is not always distinct. For people commonly confuse this perception with an obscure judgement they make concerning the nature of something which they think exists in the painful spot [. . .], but in fact it is the sensation alone which they perceive clearly.
>
> (AT 8, 22; CSM 1, 208)

Some paragraphs later, Descartes explains that in order to avoid error, we must withhold from making judgements about the exact nature of the source of our sensations. We must "merely judge that there is in the objects (that is in the things, whatever they may turn out to be, which are the source of our sensations) something whose nature we do not know" (AT 8, 34; CSM 1, 218). Now, we can read Elisabeth's reference to her female sex in two different ways. First, we can read her as referring to her sex as the source of the bodily weakness she is experiencing, and in that case her reference must be seen as the kind of obscure judgement Descartes is warning against. Her experience of weakness can be very clear, but it does not in itself give her grounds to judge that it is caused by her sex. Second, we can read her as referring to an intrinsically gendered experience of bodily weakness, where gender is experienced as an aspect of the sensation rather than as its cause. According to this latter reading, the experience of being (in this case) female can in itself be completely clear, but Elisabeth and her readers must not make any judgement about the exact nature of its source. We must not, for example, make the judgement that the experience of gender is caused by a particular anatomical feature.[20]

In her interpretation of the Cartesian mind-body union, Lilli Alanen points out that the "problem with the notion of the mind-body union is its hybrid nature" (2003, 62). Like the notions of the mind and the body, this third notion is claimed by Descartes to be primitive, but whereas the mind and the body have their respective "principal attributes through which the human mind can have clear and distinct knowledge" the notion of the mind-body union "is not simple but composite" (Alanen 2003, 62). Perceived from the perspective of clear and distinct knowledge this is a problem. As we have seen, sensations can be very clear, but they are rarely, if ever, distinct.[21] But, on the other hand, as Alanen continues by pointing out, the primitive and truly hybrid nature of the

mind-body union has the effect that our sensations and other bodily experiences are irreducible to either the mind or the body. The irreducible nature of sensations successfully blocks any attempt to identify pain with certain motions in the brain, for example. When we look at the gender of the mind-body union from this point of view, we see that the experience of gender escapes clear and distinct knowledge: in its composite nature it cannot be known through either of the two principal attributes, thought and extension. Gender is a genuine hybrid of mind and body, intrinsically present in our sensations of pain and pleasure, and cannot be reduced to either the mind, which when it is studied through the attribute of thought reveals itself to have no sex, or to the body, with its anatomical details, which can be studied through the attribute of extension and where the possible variation between the sexes ultimately becomes an empirical question. Gender is, as Alanen characterizes the mind-body union, "a brute fact of experience" (2003, 58) and as such an essential aspect of human existence.[22]

Descartes' focus on the mind-body union as a primitive notion provides an excellent basis to criticize reductive explanations of gender, and particularly the explanatory model which has in later feminist terminology been called biological reductionism. But even if sensations cannot be reduced to their bodily causes, they do, according to Descartes, have them. The bodily causes of at least some modes of thought is why Poulain, who emphasizes the bodily nature of thought and even claims, in *De l'éducation des dames*, that "all the actions of the mind [. . .] depend on the participation of the body" (Poullain 2002, 213), has to claim that all bodily organs involved in thinking are similar in men and women, in order to be able to claim that minds are equal, not only when considered independently, but also as part of the mind-body union (Poullain 2002, 82–83).[23] Poulain can challenge the Thomistic claim about a bodily grounded moral incontinence in women only by arguing that all relevant bodily organs in men and women are identical. Descartes himself puts, as we saw in the first section, much emphasis on those modes of thought that are independent of the body and in his case the Thomistic claim can, I argue, be challenged also by looking at the distinction and relation between the modes of thought that depend on the body and those that do not. In other words, we have to look at the relation between the actions and passions of the mind, a topic which is, as we know, at the centre of Descartes' correspondence with Elisabeth.

First, we must return to Elisabeth's reference to the weakness of her sex and note that despite a superficial similarity, her remark is essentially different from Aquinas' claim that in women "reason flourishes but little because of the imperfection of corporal nature". She is referring to an imperfection of her corporeal nature, but she is not claiming that this bodily weakness affects her capacity to reason. She claims that due to its weakness, her *body* is "affected very easily by the afflictions of the soul

and has none of the strength to bring itself back into line" (AT 4, 208; S, 88). Her claim is not about how her body affects her soul, but about how her body is unable to prevent itself from being affected by the passions of her soul, and on these grounds she is questioning the therapeutic aspect of Descartes' advice. However strong her mind, she doubts that it can cure her bodily symptoms (and therefore she still considers, as she explains to Descartes, to continue taking the waters of Spa in order to restore her bodily balance). In this letter Elisabeth is referring to effects on the body, but later on in the correspondence, she emphasizes—and gets Descartes to accept—that "there are diseases that destroy altogether the power of reasoning" and "others that diminish the force of reason" (AT 4, 269; S, 100).[24] Now she is discussing how the body can interfere with the soul and her example is interesting, not least from a gender perspective. She writes:

> When Epicurus was struggling to convince his friends that he felt no pain from his kidney stones, instead of crying like the vulgar, he was leading the life of the philosopher and not that of a prince or a captain or a courtier. For he knew that nothing could come to him from outside that would make him forget his role and cause him to fail to rise above his circumstances according to his philosophy.
>
> (AT 4, 269; S, 100)

Here Elisabeth's point seems to be that when an intensive pain, such as that caused by kidney stones, diminishes the force of reason, the disturbance can still be overcome by someone who can focus solely on his or her reason, but not by someone who has to lead an active life and take external circumstances into account. She is using the example to explain her inability to focus solely on reason, but here she is identifying herself as a prince, not as a woman.[25] The difference between Epicurus and the prince, captain, or courtier is not a difference in gender or any other kind of bodily disposition, but in what kind of life they are leading. When it comes to the weakness of her body, Elisabeth finds it relevant to refer to her sex, but when it comes to reason's ability to disregard bodily and other disturbances, it is not a question of bodily disposition as such, but of what kind of life one is leading.[26]

When Descartes replies to this letter, he also distinguishes between those bodily disturbances that entirely prevents "the will from being free" (AT 4, 282; S, 107) and "other indispositions, which do not altogether trouble the senses but simply alter the humours and make one find oneself extraordinarily inclined to sadness anger or some other passion" (AT 4, 283; S, 107). In the latter cases, the will and thereby also the capacity of making judgements, remains free. As is well known, Descartes holds that judgement consists of two components, a perception of the intellect and an act of the will (AT 8, 17–18; CSM 1, 204).[27] The role of the will is

crucial, because we can always avoid error if we assert only those perceptions that are clear and distinct. The mental capacity of intellect (*intellectus*) must not be confused with the bodily grounded capacity of native intelligence (*ingenium*), discussed in the previous section, but we can note that when Descartes defines judgement in *Principia*, the perceptions of the intellect include perceptions of the pure understanding as well as sensory perceptions and the imagination (AT 8, 17; CSM 1, 204), whereof the latter does, as we have seen, belong to the capacity of *ingenium*.

When we take the role of the will into consideration, we can draw the conclusion that even if Descartes' hypothesis in *Primae Cogitationes* turns out to be correct and women are natively less intelligent than men, he still attributes to us an equal ability to avoid error as long as we do not assert to what we do not perceive clearly and distinctly.[28] This conclusion is strengthened by what Descartes has to say about the equality of judgement and reason at the beginning of *Discourse de la Méthode*. As we saw in the previous section, he distinguishes "the power of judging well and of distinguishing the true from false" (AT 6, 2; CSM 1, 111), which is equal in all humans, from capacities of imagination and memory, which show great individual variation. He also points out that whereas the "greatest souls are capable of the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues [. . .] those who proceed but very slowly can make much greater progress, if they always follow the right path, than those who hurry and stray from it" (AT 6, 2; CSM 1, 111). From this point of view we can argue against the Thomistic claim about women's moral incontinence by claiming that even if there is some cognitively relevant imperfection in women's nature, a woman is as able as a man to overcome her imperfection by applying her power of judging in accordance with the right method. Thus education, the task of learning how to use one's reason, becomes more essential than native abilities. If women appear morally incontinent, this is due to a lack of the right form of education.

Perceived from a historical perspective we might here identify a transition from the idea of women's moral incontinence to the idea of our inferior intellectual capacities. Malebranche was not the only Cartesian who held that there are intellectually significant differences in the brains of men and women, and it is not surprising that most twentieth-first-century feminists, who think that no modes of thought can be fully distinguished from matter, hold a position that is in fact very close to Poulain's. Today it is commonplace to argue that brain research has not been able to show any cognitively significant differences between men and women, and that differences between the genders must rather be seen as differences in education and socialization. These two claims constituted the backbone of Poulain's feminism.

When we consider Descartes' contribution to our understanding of gender, I think that his emphasis on the mutual independence of the three primitive notions is particularly important. He teaches us that we

can know different things about gender depending on which notion we choose and that the knowledge achieved through one notion cannot be reduced to any of the other notions. This perspective is philosophically important and it has a feminist potential particularly because it shows that the experience of gender cannot be reduced to ether anatomy or pure thought. But at the end of the day Elisabeth's initial question, quoted at the very beginning of this chapter, is still standing. As long as Descartes is unable to show how the soul is able to affect the body and vice versa, he is also unable to show how it is possible that bodily conditions can sometimes take away the freedom of the will, as he claims in his letter of 1 September 1645 (AT 4, 281–87; S, 106–09), but is under normal conditions able to make voluntary judgements independently of bodily modes of thought, such as the passions and the imagination.[29] He is facing a serious metaphysical problem here, and without a metaphysical foundation, a feminist argument based on the independence of the will remains as shaky as an argument based on empirical evidence supporting that there are no cognitively significant differences between the brains of men and women. It is no surprise that Poulain's argument, allowing for a bodily element in all modes of thought, has proved more long-lived.[30]

Notes

1 My account is deeply indebted to the work of Lilli Alanen, particularly as it is articulated in Alanen 2003, 2004. See also Deborah Brown 2006 and Brown's chapter in this volume. I thank both authors for insightful discussions about the different aspects of the Cartesian mind-body union.

2 For discussions of Descartes' notion of gender, see also Hoffmann 1969; Clarke 1999; Reuter 2002; Heinämaa 2004.

3 It must be noted that my use of the term "gender" differs from gender as it is used in the so-called sex/gender distinction, where gender refers to experiential and/or socially constructed aspects of our gendered lives as distinguished from biological sex. I use gender as a term which is not distinguished from, but includes bodily sex as well as diverse experiential, cultural, and social interpretations of sex. For discussions of philosophical problems connected to the sex/gender distinction, see Gatens 1983; Heinämaa 1996; and for a discussion of why the distinction cannot be used when we interpret historical texts, see Laqueur 1990 and my critical remarks on some aspects of his interpretation in Reuter 2002, 113–15.

4 For discussions of Plato, Augustine, and Aquinas on gender, see Reuter, Grahn, and Paakkinen 2014, 641–54; and on the two latter also Paakkinen 2016, 20–86. Special thanks to Simo Knuuttila for helpful advice on the passages from Augustine and Aquinas included here.

5 For a discussion of this passage from *Parts of Animals*, see Deslauriers 2018. It is important to note, though, that despite identifying this *correlation* between male physiology and moral virtue, Aristotle did not claim that the moral incontinence discussed in *Politics* (1260a14) is *caused* by women' imperfect biological constitution, discussed in *The Generation of Animals* (765b9–766a37, 775a15–16), see Deslauriers 2009.

6 My translation. In the second edition from 1641 Gournay abandons her Scholastic language and simply emphasizes that the difference between the sexes is not a difference in species. Here she also writes that the unique form is the rational rather than the human soul. For both versions of the text, see Gournay 2002, 978.
7 For a detailed discussion of Gournay's Aristotelianism, see Deslauriers (Forthcoming).
8 The exception is the posthumous *Primae cogitationes circa generationem animalium*, which I will discuss in the next section.
9 See Mikko Yrjönsuuri's chapter in this volume for a detailed discussion of what Descartes actually means when he writes that one "seems to see".
10 Many scholars have argued that Descartes' thought and particularly his mind-body dualism contributed to the history of feminist thought by strengthening claims about the non-gendered nature of the mind in general and of reason in particular: see Hoffmann 1969; Perry 1985; Schiebinger 1989; Harth 1992; Atherton 1993; O'Neill 1999; Broad 2002, 2012, 2015; Stuurman 2004; Hutton 2005. I agree about the impact of the Cartesian approach, but I do not agree with Schiebinger, who contrasts the Cartesian influence with the futility of Gournay's Aristotelian argument. According to Schiebinger, however "brilliantly [Gournay and other Aristotelian feminists] stood Aristotle on his head, he was easily set upright again" (1989, 170). Gournay did not stand Aristotle on his head, but rather used some of his most fundamental principles in order to criticize misinterpretations of the Aristotelian heritage. On Gournay's use of Aristotelian principles, see Deslauriers (Forthcoming).
11 On Poulain's Cartesian feminism, see Stuurman 2004; Pellegrin 2011; Reuter 2013, 2017.
12 There is a growing scholarly literature on Descartes' notion of life and the problems he encounters in his attempt to explain life and particularly generation without recourse to teleological causes. I am unable to do justice to this literature here and only mention my direct influences, which are Gaukroger 2000; Detlefsen 2016.
13 On the history of the manuscript, see AT 11, 501–504. We do not know who erased the passage or why, but we can note that the passage begins by making a reference to the foetus' "sympathy of motion with the mother" (AT 11, 515). "Sympathy of motion" can be seen as one of those, as Stephen Gaukroger puts it, "offending sympathies and powers of the [Renaissance] naturalists" (2000, 384), which Descartes wanted to get rid of and it is more likely that the passage was erased because it mentions sympathy of motion than because of its claims about sexual differentiation as such. On Descartes' criticism of sympathetic and antipathetic influences, see *Principia* IV art. 187 (AT 8, 314–15; CSM 1, 279), and also Sutton 2000, 701–02. My interpretation of *Primae cogitationes*, including the translations from Latin, is indebted to Mikko Yrjönsuuri. Additional thanks to Juhana Toivonen and Miira Tuominen for discussions about the meaning of *ingenium*.
14 The idea that the female sexual organ is an inverted version of the male organ was a commonplace in Galenic medicine (Schiebinger 1989, 163–65; Laqueur 1990, 26). Descartes seems to adopt this view, but whereas the Galenic explanatory model was based on the balance between four qualitatively different elements, he tries to establish a mechanistic explanation, based on location.
15 There is an extensive scholarly literature on Descartes' scientific method in general and his uses of hypotheses in particular, to which I cannot do justice here. My immediate sources are Garber 1993; Detlefsen 2016.

16 See particularly the work of Annie Bitbol-Hespériès, who argues that in addition to his own observations, Descartes' accounts of generation were indebted to Fabricius of Aquapendente's treatises *De Ovi Pulli* and *De Formato Faetu* (Bitbol-Hespériès 2000, 358–61). Descartes mentions Fabricius' writings in the same letter to Mersenne (2 November 1646), where he mentions his dissections of embryos (AT 4, 555).
17 For a discussion of the similarities and differences between plants and animals as categories of living beings, see Detlefsen 2016, 145–53.
18 I compare Aristotle and Descartes in order to illuminate the difference in explanatory principles, but there was not a direct historical transition from the former to the latter. Accounts of generation in Descartes' time were dominated by Galen's model according to which women possessed their own colder and less active kind of seed rather than a similar, but less concocted from of seed, as Aristotle claims, see Maclean 1980, 36. This difference between Aristotle's and Galen's models is not relevant for the point I am making since both models hold that the seed produced by the female is weaker and less perfect.
19 Malebranche's position resembles a synthesis of Descartes praise of Elisabeth and his remarks in *Primae cogitationes*: Malebranche defends a general difference between the sexes, but allows for individual variation that can be greater than the variation between the sexes (1997, 130). On Malebranche and women, see Broad 2012, 2015.
20 The first reading is probably a better contextual interpretation, since Elisabeth seems to refer to an established understanding of sexual difference in order to explain her experience, but the second reading makes it possible to spell out how Descartes' view makes it possible to criticize that model. For a discussion of this passage, see also Shapiro 2007, 42. Shapiro suggests that Elisabeth's reference to the weakness of her sex can be read as sounding a note of irony, by which she wants to question the plausibility of Descartes' neo-stoic advice. I come back to the question of what kind of weakness Elisabeth is referring to.
21 The question of whether Descartes thinks that sensations can ever be distinctly perceived is a point of disagreement among scholars. We saw above that in *Principia* art. 46 he writes that "an intense pain [. . .] is indeed very clear, but is not always distinct" (AT 8, 22; CSM 1, 208), and in art. 66 he holds, in the Latin text, that when we take great care in our judgements, sensations, emotions, and appetites can "be clearly perceived" (AT 8, 32; CSM 1, 216), whereas the French translation has it "connoisance claire et distincte" (AT 9, 55). Most scholars see this inconsistent terminology as a lack of a strict definition of the terms "clear" and "distinct" and hold that despite this terminological inconsistency, Descartes seems to think that sensations cannot in the strict sense be known distinctly since there is no principal attribute through which they can be known. See Alanen 2003, 64–70.
22 Following Maurice Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Descartes, Sara Heinämaa has showed how this experience can be taken as the starting point for a phenomenological investigation of sexual difference, see particularly Heinämaa 2003, 2004.
23 For a discussion of Poulain's emphasis on bodily thoughts and how it differs from Descartes' view, see Reuter 2013, 79–80, 2017, 37–39.
24 The context of this letter, and of Descartes' reply, is a discussion about the relations between virtue and happiness, with a particular focus on the nature of the greatest good. I am here bracketing this context in order to focus exclusively on reason's and the will's ability to overcome bodily obstacles. For detailed discussions of virtue, happiness, and the greatest good, see particularly Calvin Normore's and Frans Svensson's chapters in this volume.

25 Many scholars, including myself, have wanted to identify a feminist element in Elisabeth's use of her female experience as a criticism of Descartes' dualism and neo-stoicism, see Harth 1992; Nye 1996, 1999; Wartenberg 1999; Reuter 1999; Broad 2002, 31–34. Though there is a feminist dimension to the claim that bodily experience must be taken into philosophical consideration, there are two problems with this interpretation. First, an emphasis on embodied experience can be used for feminist as well as anti-feminist purposes, as is showed for example by the passage from Aquinas I have been discussing. Second, recent decades of research on intersectionality (see, for example, Collins and Bilge 2016) has showed that experience is never constituted by only one aspect, such as gender, but by many intersecting aspects, including social standing, language, and religion. These latter aspects were all constitutive of Elisabeth's experience and in the passage discussed here social standing gains special significance.

26 See also Elisabeth's next letter, where she makes explicit reference to the demands of her own life (AT 4, 288; S, 109–10), and Brown's chapter in this volume, where she discusses the metaphysical implications of Descartes' account of the relevance of everyday experience.

27 I discuss the role of the will in Descartes' account of judgement and its connection to his claim that reason is equal in all humans in Reuter 2013; on the role of will in judgement, see also Alanen 2014 and Tomas Ekenberg's chapter in this volume.

28 Jacqueline Broad has argued that Malebranche's concept of freedom as the power to suspending assent allows for a similar feminist interpretation, despite his emphasis on differences in the brains of men and women. This feminist interpretation was developed particularly by the British philosophers Mary Astell and Mary Chudleigh, see Broad 2012, 2015.

29 For an excellent discussion of Elisabeth's criticism of Descartes' account of voluntary action, see Tollefsen 1999.

30 I thank my co-editor Frans Svensson for his excellent comments on an earlier version of this chapter as well as for his good judgement, generosity, and comradeship throughout our work on this volume.

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4 "I certainly seem to see"

Embodiment in the Second Meditation

Mikko Yrjönsuuri

One of the many striking sentences in René Descartes's Second meditation is "Yet I certainly seem to see, hear, and to be warmed" (*At certe videre videor, audire, calescere*) (CSM 2, 19; AT 7, 29). What exactly does "seem to see" mean here? What is it for the meditator to appear to have sensory experiences while having voluntarily renounced all belief in bodies? Sense organs are taken to be corporeal, but still necessary for sense perception. A little before in the same meditation, the meditator has alluded to the certainty that sense perception "surely does not occur without a body" (CSM 2, 18; AT 7, 27). Thus, renouncing belief in bodies entails renouncing belief in sense perception. But still, the appearance of it remains certain. How can that be?

Reading the sentence in its context shows clearly that part of Descartes's point here is that the meditator, who is at this point certain of his own existence as a thinking thing, has also certainty of the appearance of having a body that has sense organs and the ability for sensory perception. As the meditator puts it a couple lines earlier, "it is also the same 'I' who has sensory perceptions, or is aware of bodily things as it were through the senses" (CSM 2, 19; AT 7, 29).

My aim in this chapter is to provide a careful analysis of how the body is present to the meditator even at the depths of the Second meditation, in which it is assumed on the basis of the skeptical doubt that the meditator would not have a body embedded among material things. Even in that situation, the meditator has certainty of apparent sensory perceptions, or "certainly seems to see". That is, the meditator has certainty of experiential embodiment, but entertains on the basis of skeptical doubt the stance that one must deny belief in the existence of the body. As is well known, the existence of the body is subsequently proved in the Sixth meditation, and most commentary discussions of embodiment related to the *Meditations* rely on the Sixth meditation. My strategy here is to look at Descartes's arguments in the Second meditation without recourse to the arguments of the Sixth meditation, which come later in the discussion. Instead, I use Descartes's theoretical account of vision as a help for

understanding his conceptual framework and the way in which the arguments of the Second meditation are to be construed.[1]

I proceed as follows. First, I will present the most relevant (for my purposes) passages in the Second meditation, describing the steps taken by the meditator there. Then in section 2, I turn to analyzing how Descartes theoretically accounts for actual vision, and the roles of the body and the mind in vision. Section 3 looks at how and when sensory perception is reliable—or misleading—through discussing the active character of the meditator's freedom in judgments concerning sensory experience in the Second meditation.

1. The Second Meditation Narrative

While presentations of the so-called Cartesian circle usually ignore all reference to the body, it is clear that already the Second meditation opens the meditator's inquiry into the knowledge of the material world. Even the title of the second meditation refers to the material world, claiming that the mind "is better known than the body" (*sit notior cum corpus*). Furthermore, at the beginning of the Second meditation everything appears unknown. Assuming that everything doubtful is false, the meditator claims "I have no senses" (*Nullos plane habeo sensus*). (CSM 2, 16; AT 7, 24.)

As the process continues, the meditator very famously finds certainty in the existence of self on the basis of that very doubt. The meditator's own existence thus becomes indubitable. The meditator then confesses ignorance on what the self really is. To find this knowledge, the meditator turns to what could be called the then received view of human nature, going through things that were commonly thought to belong to human existence. Seeing that there still is no certainty in anything bodily, he turns to functions of the soul in order to find something where certainty prevails. The passage in which the meditator considers the functions of the so-called vegetative and sensitive parts of the soul is worth quoting in full.

> But what about the attributes I assigned to the soul? Nutrition or movement? Since now I do not have a body, these are mere fabrications. Sense-perception? This surely does not occur without a body, and besides, when asleep I have appeared to perceive through the senses many things which I afterwards realized that I did not perceive through the senses at all.
>
> (CSM 2, 18; AT 7, 27.)

In this passage Descartes rejects the idea that sense perception could take place without a body. As an additional remark he alludes to the apparent sense perception one might have in dreams. This is a theme he continues in the considerations from which the title of my chapter is taken.

Before that, however, the meditator considers thought, which is very famously found to be certain not only as an appearance of thought but as real thought. The meditator is not merely certain of seeming to think, but of really thinking. This the meditator explicates further with terminology that was traditionally associated with the intellectual soul: "I am a mind, or intellect, or intelligence, or reason" (*id est, mens, sive animus, sive intellectus, sive ratio*) (CSM 2, 18; AT 7, 27).

After reviewing the common accounts of human nature, the meditator carefully considers and excludes the possibility of using imagination to better capture his or her nature. This is found to be impossible, because imagination is about corporeal things, not about thoughts. "Imagining is simply contemplating the shape or image of a corporeal thing" (CSM 2, 19; AT 7, 28), the meditator notices, reasoning then that all those images must be at this stage compared to dreams, because under the skeptical doubt no bodies are yet assumed to exist. As we apparently may infer, using imagination to find out what one's own nature could be would first require knowledge that one is a corporeal thing. Noteworthily though, the meditator does not claim that imagining is merely apparent, which he goes on to do in the case of sense perception. It seems one could already at this point be certain of really imagining things, in Descartes's view, rather than just of appearing to imagine. However, the meditator does not point this out expressly.

When the meditator then turns to the case of sense perception, the certainty is different. Certainty can only be found in "being aware" (*animadverto*) of things "as if" (*tanquam*) coming from the senses. The meditator is thus careful to notice that under skeptical doubt, one must deny the reality of sense-perceptions, since they depend on the body, whose existence is still under doubt. Let us consider a somewhat wider quote:

> Lastly, it is also the same "I" who has sensory perceptions, or is aware of bodily things as it were through the senses. For example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly seem to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called "having a sense-perception" is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking.
>
> (CSM 2, 19; AT 7, 29.)

The main thrust of this passage is to point out that there is something in sense perception that we can be certain of, and that aspect of it can be put into the category of thought. Though sense perception as such is a corporeal activity, an aspect of it takes place in the mind. At this point, the most natural reading for a scholastic reader of the time appears to be that real sense perception (which takes place in the body) is somehow

accompanied by intellectual activity. Thus, when one sees light, one not only has light in one's visual faculty located in the necessarily and essentially embodied sensitive soul, but one also understands intellectually that one is seeing light. Descartes's point would thus be to show how one can doubt what happens in the sensitive faculty of vision, but one cannot doubt the presence of the accompanying intellectual events. If one refrains from judging that the understanding of seeing light results from actually seeing it, one remains safe from doubt.

After considering in this manner what were the then traditional faculties of the soul, the meditator turns to studying our knowledge of the "bodies we touch and see" (CSM 2, 20; AT 7, 30). For our purposes it is not necessary to go into the depths of this discussion. The meditator takes a piece of honeycomb wax and melts it with a fire. This changes all its sensory qualities, the meditator claims, but the body itself is still there. This consideration leads to the conclusion that the nature of the wax is not distinctly known by the senses. Instead its nature as extension becomes clearly and distinctly known by "mental scrutiny" (*mentis inspection*) (CSM 2, 21; AT 7, 31).

For our purposes the most interesting remark comes when the meditator turns to considering the certainty of the existence of the wax, and thereby notices that one's own existence is better known. Any route leading to the knowledge of the existence of the wax, reveals first the existence of self. At this point the meditator also makes a very interesting distinction between two ways in which seeing the wax might be merely apparent. Under the skeptical doubt, we must consider two possibilities and one impossibility regarding the apparent visual perception of the wax:

> It is possible that what I see is not really the wax; it is possible that I do not even have eyes with which to see anything. But when I see, or think I see (I am not here distinguishing the two), it is simply not possible that I who am now thinking am not something.
>
> (CSM 2, 22; AT 7, 33)

Seeing something can fail (1) if the object putatively seen is not there, but it also fails (2) if the subject has no eyes, and thus there is no seeing at all. That I seem to see might lead me wrong for the fundamental reason that I do not have eyes at all, which seems possible under the skeptical doubt. On the other hand, the meditator certainly does exist when thinking of the seeing.

The meditator concludes the Second meditation with satisfaction. It has been shown that knowledge of the external world cannot be achieved by the senses. Vision, taken "strictly" (*proprie*), does not yield us knowledge of the corporeal world; knowledge is only to be achieved by the intellect. But the corporeal world—including the senses—is less

present to the intellect than the "I" itself, or the mind. Thus the mind is known better than the body, as the title of the Second meditation claims.

2. Descartes's Theory of Vision

As we have now seen, vision is for Descartes an essentially corporeal process taking place in the body. The intellect plays a role in formation of what can be called sensory knowledge, but vision in and of itself is a function of the eyes and the brain. As we saw, this is the reason why the meditator is not able to affirm in the Second meditation that he or she sees in the proper sense of the word. Certainty extends only to the appearance of seeing, not to the seeing itself.

My aim in this section is to show exactly what, according to Descartes, the role of the intellect is when we actually see with our bodily eyes. My point is not to claim that the meditator would in the Second meditation know this for certain. The point is merely to provide background, since vision is an issue in which Descartes has a clear specific theory in mind, and even the Second meditation is written in a way that would not run against Descartes's well-considered theory. The main sources for understanding his theory are to be found in his *Optics*, published 1637, or few years before the *Meditations*, and in the Replies to sixth objections, published together with the meditations themselves. In the O*ptics*, Descartes's main aim is to study how brain, eyes, and optical instruments function, and his comments on the mind's role are occasional. In this respect, *Optics* can be seen to continue the project he took in *Of Man*, to explain all the functions traditionally attributed to the animal soul by purely corporeal processes that do not need to involve any special substance like the soul. In the short passage in the Replies to sixth objections, the aim is different. He aims exactly at explaining what the role of the intellect is, but due to the compressed form of the discussion, it has been found difficult to interpret.

In the *Optics*, Descartes departs from older accounts in two related main respects, which lead to various further differences. First, he locates the image formation taking place in the eye on the retina at the bottom of the eye in the Keplerian fashion, rejecting older accounts positing an image in the eye jelly (AT 6, 106–08). This has the important implication that the image in the eye is on a surface and not in a three-dimensional space. Descartes even describes how the visual image produced by the eye can be experimentally observed on an egg shell by taking an eye of an ox, and preparing it by replacing the bottom of the eye with the egg shell (CSM 1, 166; AT 6, 115). Furthermore, Descartes makes it very clear that as the image is transmitted from the eye to the brain and processed there, it is not a three-dimensional scale model of the seen object. Rather, the systematic pressures of the visual nerves form an indexical

representation of the retinal visual image on the inner surface of the brain chamber, and on the pineal gland (AT 6, 128–29). He suggests that these surface configurations are sort of "engravings" (*taille-douce*) (e.g. AT 6, 113) or "paintings" (*peinture*) (e.g. AT 6, 130) whose features are not literally similar to the objects they represent. Descartes expressly refers to perspectival paintings where regular dissimilarity rather than similarity represents correctly. That is, circles are normally represented by ovals, and squares by rhombuses (CSM 1, 165; AT 6, 113). In general, Descartes opposed vehemently the idea that visual imagery in the brain would carry similarity with the visual objects.[2]

Descartes's core idea of how the mind is aware of the visual object is thus not based on a "species", or a similarity being carried over through the medium to the eye, to the brain, and to the mind.[3] On the pineal gland, and *a fortiriori* in the mind, the representations of seen objects differ greatly but systematically from the objects themselves. Most importantly, representations on the pineal gland have only a "natural connection" to ideas belonging to the visual categories—and no similarity. Thus, when something red is seen, the nerves at the bottom of the eye are moved in certain ways, which are transmitted to the brain as movements in the animal spirits of the brain chamber. These produce certain impressions on the surface of the pineal gland, and the mind "by natural connection" has a visual idea of red as something that is seen. Descartes carefully explicates that his position is not that the mind somehow "sees" what is happening at the surfaces in the brain (CSM 1, 167; AT 6, 130). The idea when postulating the natural connecting is not that the mind registers neural movements and checks with some sort of handbook what the external influence is. However, the natural connection is not causal either. It simply means that certain impressions on the surface of the pineal gland come systematically with certain ideas that will occur with them.[4]

Vision is primarily about color and light, but let us take another example. Descartes's discussion on spatial vision yielding knowledge of sizes, shapes, and especially distances is very fruitful for understanding the respective roles of the bodily organisms and the mind in vision. When Descartes explains how we judge the distance at which the seen objects are, he for the most part relies on direct or indirect mental considerations. Looking out from a car window, we may for example have to keep turning the eyes or even the head, and by estimating how quickly the visual angle changes, we can estimate by ratiocination the distance to the mountain or the house that is seen (CSM 1, 170–72; AT 6, 137–40).

However, for objects very close to the eye, closer than "four or five feet", as Descartes says (CSM 1, 173; AT 6, 144), there is a way to perceive the distance directly. This is because visual sharpness requires accommodation of the eyes to the distance of the object we look at. According to Descartes, accommodation does not the happen in the shape

of the lens, as is nowadays thought, but by altering the distance between the lens and the retina at the bottom of the eye through modifying the shape of the whole eyeball. The exact mechanism is irrelevant for our purposes here; we only need to note the simple fact that the mechanism is neurally registered in the brain. Descartes points out that there is a special nerve connection from the eye to the brain that transmits the accommodation of the shape of the eye. The transmitted impressions of the accommodation at the brain and the pineal gland do not, however, bring about awareness of the shape of the eye, but by natural connection, they give the idea of a very short or not so short distance from the eye to the seen object. That is, we do not feel the accommodation of the eye as such. Rather, there is a natural connection from the accommodation of the eyes to the idea of the seen object being either very close or not so close. It appears incorrect to say that this closeness, or lack of it, is seen, but according to Descartes we may have some direct perceptual feel of how close the seen object is (CSM 1, 170; AT 6, 137).

The idea of the distance of the seen object has no similarity to the shape of the eye. In this case, it is not even tempting to postulate similarity to explain for the natural connection, as it might be in the case of the idea of red and of the material object seen. In a similarly inexplicable but natural manner, Descartes explains in his *Principles of Philosophy* (IV, §190) how nerves from different internal organs produce different affectional perceptions ranging from hunger and thirst to joy and other emotions (CSM 1, 280; AT 8, 316–17). Natural connection does not guarantee any sort of similarity or even direct grasp of what exactly are the causes of the neural impression. We do not necessarily feel the throat when feeling thirsty nor the heart when feeling joy.

For the most part, Descartes thought that we understand rather than directly see the world as a three-dimensional Euclidian space. Sizes, shapes, and distances to and between objects are matters we judge by the intellect. This is a view he shared with earlier theoreticians of vision. Like the scholastics, Descartes thought that the primary object of vision is color and light. These primary objects of vision—or more correctly their ideas—are in Descartes's view not visually but intellectually organized in our minds into coherent spatial structures that form ideas of objects. Seeing a person on the slope of a faraway mountain involves intellectual judgments about the size and the distance. Visual operations in this case can be understood to amount merely to neural re-organization of surfaces in the eye, in the brain, and most importantly in the pineal gland, yielding by natural connection ideas of the primary objects of vision. But there is more: we do make judgments about sizes, shapes, and distances on the basis of what we see. While Descartes did also think that judgments about the colors are in fact intellectual, the intellectual character of the judgments concerning the size, shape, and distance of the person are even more obviously intellectual. When judging that the person seen on

the slope of a mountain is in fact a normal sized human but simply very far from us, we use our mind and not just our eyes.

In the Sixth objections, the "ninth and most worrying difficulty" attacks Descartes's conclusion in the Second meditation that the intellect is more reliable than he senses. The objection relies on the standard Aristotelian view that everything in the intellect ultimately derives from the senses. Thus, in the intellect there is no "certainty unless it has previously derived it from the senses when they are working as they should" (CSM 2, 282; AT 7, 418). Suppose a stick half immersed in water and thus visually appearing bent. As the objector sees it, vision makes an error when the stick appears bent, but the error cannot be corrected by the intellect. Instead, the objector claims that we must use the sense of touch to correct the mistake. This shows, the objector thinks, that we "achieve the greatest certainty of which man is naturally capable" by relying on our senses in a systematic and careful fashion. "The mind often goes astray", as the objector points out.

In his answer, Descartes aims at making clear that the senses do not make judgments and thus cannot make errors. Explaining his point, Descartes distinguishes three grades of sense perception (. . . *sensus* . . . *tres quasi gradus in ipso*). The text describing these three grades is worth quoting in full. With my emphasis on certain expressions, the text is as follows.

> The *first* is a matter purely of the *bodily organ's being affected by external objects*, and this can be nothing other than the motion of the particles of this organ, and the change of shape and place resulting from this motion. The *second* contains everything that immediately results in the mind on account of its being united to the bodily organ that is affected in this way. Of this kind are *perceptions* of pain, arousal, thirst, hunger, colours, sound, flavour, smell, heat, cold, and so forth, which arise, as was stated in the Sixth meditation, from the union and virtual fusion of the mind and the body. The *third* level includes all the *judgments* that, on the occasion of motions in the bodily organs, we have been accustomed to make since childhood about things existing outside us.
>
> (CSM 2, 294–95; AT 7, 436–37)

Here Descartes wants to separate, in addition to the distinction between purely bodily processes and mental processes, also between immediate perceptions and judgments that we make on their basis: (1) The first grade comprises everything that happens in the bodily organs. Later in the text, Descartes refers the reader to his *Optics* for a longer discussion of what takes place in the eye, the optic nerve, and the brain. For our purposes, we need not go further in this analysis than we already did. (2) The

second grade consists of the immediate perceptions. Descartes refers to a list drawn from the Sixth meditation (see CSM 2, 52; AT 7, 74–75). The list can also be compared to how Descartes describes the sensory qualities of the wax in the Second meditation (CSM 2, 20; AT 7, 30). When we compare with the theory presented in *Optics*, it appears obvious that the perceptions that "immediately result in the mind" are the ideas arising by "natural connection", or involuntarily and directly.

From our viewpoint, it is most important to look at Descartes's description of the third grade. (3) The third grade consists of the judgments that we make "on the occasion of motions in bodily organs". That is, first grade sensation not only allows perceptions of sensory qualities to arise, but also gives occasion for the mind to make judgments. It is worth noticing that Descartes does not say that we make judgments on the basis of the second grade perceptions but rather "on the occasion of" what is happening in our bodily organ. His point is to make two distinctions. On the one hand, the corporeal level of sense perception is distinct from the mental, and on the other the immediate mental perceptual ideas are distinct from the judgments we actively form. It is also very important to bear in mind that for Descartes, all judgments are voluntary.[5] We can refrain from assent even in the case of the most clear and distinct ideas, and even more so in the case of sensory ideas. It seems that one way to look at the distinction is to understand immediate perceptions as passive, while the judgments are characteristically active.

The objection Descartes is here replying to is explicitly directed at the Second meditation and its conclusion that the mind is better known than the material world (*corpus*). From this viewpoint it is obvious to compare the distinction between perception and judgment to how Descartes treats his example of the wax. There, the core point is that sensory perception does not yield us knowledge of the nature of the wax as a material object. For such knowledge, we must rely on the intellect, and as the meditator puts it, on "mental scrutiny" (CSM 2, 21; AT 7, 31). Here Descartes is even more straightforward, since he goes on to say that the third grade of sensory perception is properly speaking not sensory perception at all. Senses do not make intellectual judgments.

Descartes makes the point in the following way. Suppose, as the objector suggests, that you see a stick half immersed in water. Now, what happens in the eyes and the brain belongs to the first level of sensation. He adds, "this leads to the second grade" (*ex ipso vero sequitur secundus*), which as said consists only of mere immediate perception of color and light from the stick. Descartes claims that

> Nothing more than this should be referred to the sensory faculty, if we distinguish it carefully from the intellect.
>
> (CSM 2, 295; AT 7, 437)

The point made here is that properly speaking sensory perceptions are not judgments. We see color and light, and if we bracket the intellect, we do not even see a stick, let alone a bent stick. If the mind is not actively present, we just cannot make a judgment whether the stick is bent or not. About half a page later in the replies Descartes points out about the senses that "no falsity occurs in them" (CSM 2, 296; AT 7, 438). That is, if there are no judgments, there cannot be falsity either. That is, Descartes interprets the at the time standard Aristotelian distinction between sensory and intellectual faculties so that the senses do not make judgments. This is very clear in the case of first grade of sensory perception, but as Descartes thought, it is the case also for the second grade of sensory perception. Immediate mental perceptual ideas do not involve judgments, which always come from the active mind. The same goes for the other direction. Judgments are not in the sensory faculty, and thus the third grade is not strictly speaking sensory at all, as it consists of the judgments made on the occasion of the sensations. Very noteworthily, this account seems to align reasonably well with how sensory and intellectual faculties were distinguished in scholastic thought.

Now, how should we then explain that the stick appears bent? Descartes reformulates this as follows,

> It appears to us in a way which would lead a child to judge that it was bent—and which may even lead us to make the same judgment, following preconceived opinions which we have become accustomed to accept from our earliest years.
>
> (CSM 2, 296; AT 7, 438.)

Neither the bodily sensory systems nor the immediate sensory ideas in the mind are thus mistaken. The error, when made, is in voluntary intellectual judgments, not in sensory perception. If we only have proper self-control, we do not make such mistakes.

3. Reliable and Misleading Appearances

Let us now return to the situation in which the meditator is in the Second meditation, when trying to evaluate what kind of attitude to take towards the apparent sensory perceptions. The meditator operates in an extremely self-controlled manner, refraining from all judgments that could be prone to error. As we have seen, the meditator reaches at the beginning of the meditation the famous certainty of his or her own existence as a mental entity. Nevertheless, the certainty of being a mental entity does not put to end the factual experience of sensory perception of the meditator's own bodily self and of the external world. The meditator does have such sensory experiences, and is certain of having them. The meditator does not cease to have the perceptual ideas that would "lead a child to judge"

(see above; CSM 2, 296; AT 7, 438) that there is a corporeal world whose part oneself is. This judgment is not avoided by eradicating those ideas. The meditator does not even try that procedure. Rather, the skeptical doubt leads simply to refusal to accept such judgments. The experience of having these ideas is there, but the judgments they would lead into on the basis of preconceived opinions are doubted and thus considered to be false until proven true. The meditator thus "seems to see" external objects with bodily eyes, although this experience is at this point considered to be potentially misleading. The meditator refrains from all related judgments.

One way to understand the meditator's situation is to compare it to looking at the stick half immersed in water. One possible stance to take in such a perceptual situation is simply to refrain from any judgment whether the stick is bent or straight. The meditator in the Second meditation refers to two crucial issues in ways reminiscent of the term "preconceived opinion" that Descartes uses in Replies to Sixth objections to describe the attitudes leading to the judgment that the half immersed stick is broken.

First, about one page into the Second meditation the meditator asks and answers, "What did I formerly think I am? A man". This question introduces a passage which discusses human nature. The meditator decides to "concentrate on what came to my thoughts spontaneously and quite naturally whenever I used to consider what I was". This correlates quite directly with "preconceived opinions" or "how a child would judge". Human nature is then discussed in terms of how we experience our bodily nature, with reference to having a face, hands, and arms, and also many kinds of functions attributed to the soul in the then traditional scholastic account. These are what Descartes would have called "preconceived opinions" (CSM 2, 17; AT 7, 25–26).

Second, the example of the wax is introduced as considering things "people commonly think" as "bodies which we touch and see". Here again, the descriptions of the wax as in the honeycomb and as melted rely at first on categories of immediate sense perception of grade two, according to the above discussed categorization. Just as the description of the meditator's human self, the discussion of the wax then introduces skeptical doubt, and turns to intellectual considerations—or an evaluation of the sensory perception at level three, where judgments are made. Both for the human nature and for the wax, the primary commonsensical sensorial picture is put aside, since it is seen not to provide a sufficient basis for certain knowledge.

One of the crucial edges of the above discussed objection from the Sixth objections is that in some perceptual situations the way in which things appear is problematic and the experience must be corrected to achieve accurate judgments concerning the real facts. The objector's approach leans on situations where a person with normal vision will have the misleading appearance. The objection could be further strengthened through considering

abnormal vision, as, for example, color blindness or other cases where people do not see with full accuracy. It appears evident that vision may yield better or worse judgments. Why not true or false, then?

Descartes appears to be committed to the view that visual information that we receive is never right or wrong. It is what it is, and it is up to the freely operating mind to make a judgment of what the seen reality in fact is like. Another commitment that he explicitly makes, is that the usefulness of the sensory system is practical rather than theoretical. We do not have the senses primarily as a medium of finding out what the world is like, but as a medium for finding out what is good and what bad for us as embodied persons.[6] In the Sixth meditation, the meditator operates on the already proven basis that we and the world in which we live have been created by God who wills good for us. This basis yields, for the meditator, also trust in the general reliability of the sensory system. It nevertheless does not guarantee that the senses always operate correctly and give the right suggestion of what to do and what to believe. Sensory perceptions must still be submitted to voluntary rational control.

Seeing the stick as bent could perhaps be compared to the feeling of hunger when one actually ought not eat. The hunger may be very real, but whether one ought to eat at that time, is an altogether different matter. Whether one really should eat does not only depend on whether one feels hunger, but on many other things too. Hunger as such in a way suggests that one should eat, but in the end the decision is a voluntary one. One has to decide voluntarily and intellectually whether the suggestion is to be followed in the particular situation. Here again, the comparison to children may be helpful. Oftentimes, children go to their parents asking for food because of feeling hungry, but the parent will judge whether it is time to eat, and perhaps tell the child the dinner will be ready in half an hour. The parent educates the child to use judgment in the appropriate way when feeling hungry. That one should always eat when hungry, is just a preconceived opinion that need to be evaluated in the context of the situation. With the apparently bent stick, the situation is similar. It does appear bent, but as a voluntary agent, an intelligent person must take the free voluntary stance to the appearance and judge for oneself whether to accept the appearance.

The commonsensical image of the meditator's self and of the external bodily world might thus be compared to the pre-dinner hunger, or to the stick appearing broken. This is the gist of the skeptical doubt. The meditator does have the experience of being a bodily agent in a material world. It feels like it, but is it really so? The meditator has not detached from the material world, but just re-evaluating how to find certainty, and care must be taken before going into a judgment concerning embodiment. The sensory awareness of one's own bodily being and of the

external material world is even in the Second meditation taken as given, but the meditator calls for extreme caution in making judgments on that basis. One ought not directly follow the suggestion of the experiential embodiment, but instead proceed from the certainty found in intellectual understanding of one's own existence, and make one's own careful voluntary stance independently of the suggestions of the senses.

How should we then understand "I certainly seem to see"? The meditator is at this point clearly having sensory experiences. What we have at issue, is not a state of abstract consideration of what visual perception is. Instead, what needs to be considered is that the meditator has accustomed since childhood to attribute seeing objects to the eyes, and perceiving other things to other sense organs. We might even say that there is a natural connection by which a mind that has the experience of seeing things has an idea of embodied existence. This easily yields the preconceived opinion that when having visual experiences one actually sees, and is embodied. This opinion may well be true, but the meditator has to be careful. Now all such preconceived opinions have been shrugged away by skeptical doubt; it is necessary to reconsider how these ideas related to embodiment ought to be approached in the quest for certainty. Certainty of their general reliability is reached in the Sixth meditation, but in the Second meditation skeptical doubt still prevails. At this point, it cannot be taken for certain that the kind of experience commonsensically called embodied is really embodied. The meditator sees normally, but at this point it cannot be taken to be certain that the seeing is really seeing with eyes looking at external objects. The experience appears embodied, but is it really that?

If we compare the situation in the Second meditation to the above discussed three grades of sense perception in the Replies to the sixth objections, it seems obvious that the meditator's aim at this point of the project is to pull the second and the third grade separate. The meditator's extreme caution calls for not rushing to judgments—to third grade of vision—from the essentially embodied experience of the second level of vision. This does give some feel of a mind detaching from the corporeal world, because in Descartes's picture, the third grade of sensory perception is not properly speaking sensory. It is intellectual, and according to the then traditional scholastic view, the intellect is not embodied. In this respect Descartes follows the then traditional view.

The self that judges is essentially intellectual and volitional, as Descartes saw it. In his intellectual environment, this was a traditional view. He also takes very seriously the then standard Aristotelian view that there is no falsity in the senses. However, the Second meditation is not a detached exercise. What we normally call embodied experience of one's own self and its environment is thoroughly present in the meditation. Embodiment is epistemically doubted, but not ignored.

In the Second meditation Descartes does not speak of the will. It is however an important presupposition for the meditator's way of proceeding that judgment is not forced but freely made. In the *Principles of Philosophy* (I, § 6) written some years later, the experience of freedom is indeed given as a presupposition, preceding even the certainty of one's own thinking existence (CSM 1, 194; AT 8, 6). The intellectual self that performs the meditations is not passive, but has freedom of spontaneity to choose the judgments that are certain, and to refrain from those that are not. The meditator is a free and intellectual agent, and has the capability to refrain from assenting to the sensory perceptions presenting the self as really seeing, and in being in various other ways too an embodied being. The relevant sensory impressions are clearly present in the Second meditation, but the mediator just does not find his or her self in the position to assent to them as certain. It only seems that he or she sees, but at that point it is important to leave open the possibility that the perception is misleading. In the context of the skeptical doubt of the Second meditation, no sensory appearance can be taken as reliable.

4. Conclusion

What is Descartes thus aiming at in his discussion of bodily experience in the Second meditation? The principle on which he is relying throughout in the discussion, is that the epistemic agent, the mind or the intellect, who has certainty over own existence, retains freedom of judgment in relation to sensory experience. The meditator is not in a real denial of sensory experience like seeing. On the contrary, the certainty of the experience of real sensory perception is often referred to. The meditator simply refrains methodically from making any judgments on this basis.

If looked upon from the viewpoint of the three grades of vision Descartes discusses in the Replies to sixth objections, it seems clear that the emphasis in the Second meditation is on the purely intellectual third grade. The meditator has sensory ideas, like the ideas of color and light, which appear to be sensory ideas of the second grade. These ideas do not yield certainty concerning anything bodily. They strongly suggest embodiment, but the meditator is in the Second meditation free to reject this suggestion, and does so—it is accepted only in the Sixth meditation after the existence of God has been proven.

The meditator's interest is in truth. There is no truth in the senses, Descartes thought, and thus his meditator did not build truth from passive sensory perception. Truth is in the domain of the active mind. The meditator proceeds actively and rationally on the intellectual path, using sensory perception as mere material for thought that cannot force one into opinions. In the quest for certainty, the essentially free meditator thus does not rely on the essentially passive process of sensory perception.

Notes

1 I am very thankful to Lilli Alanen for many ideas and illuminating discussions on Descartes, especially on his understanding of the bodily and the free nature of our existence. Actual preparation of this paper was greatly helped by discussions with the audience at a University Turku research seminar, and with Deborah Brown and Calvin Normore, among others.
2 It seems that the fact that he used words like "*peinture*" was found problematic at his time. Mersenne asked about this in a letter, but in his reply, Descartes simply plays down the question. He writes that he means, "just the configuration . . . as the nerves produce it" (AT 2, 591).
3 For the medieval accounts of vision, see e.g. Lindberg 1981; Burnyeat 2001; Knuuttila 2008; Yrjönsuuri 2007, 2014.
4 For discussions on this "natural connection", see e.g. Baker and Morris 1996, 183; Alanen 2003, 198–202.
5 See Tomas Ekenberg's chapter in this volume.
6 According to Descartes, the natural function of the passions is not truth, but "to dispose the soul to consent and contribute to actions which may serve to preserve the body or to render it in some way more perfect" (CSM 1, 376; AT 11, 430). My particular point here is that Descartes would have extended this understanding of the passions even to the passive aspect of sensory perception. Truth and assent are in the domain of the active mind, and the primary function of passive and essentially embodied sensory perception would not be to convey information, but to contribute to the preservation of the body. In animals lacking minds, sensory perception can according to Descartes lead to action, but not to knowledge. In humans, the mind would in contrast have the distinct ability to make not only choices about action but also judgments by which we gain knowledge. See also Alanen 2003, 198–202.

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Part II

Ideas, Knowledge, and Reality

5 Ideas and Reality in Descartes

Peter Myrdal and Arto Repo

The last few decades have seen a sea-change in Descartes scholarship. Important to this shift is a new way of looking at Descartes's theory of cognition.[1] According to a previously widespread reading, he makes central the *skeptical* question of whether we have any cognitive access to external reality at all. As a result, he is led to introduce ideas—inner, mental objects, given independently of external reality—notoriously forming a veil between cognizer and world.

On the novel approach, Descartes is instead concerned with the *constructive* question of the nature of our cognitive relation to reality. He is to be seen as part of a tradition of theorizing about human cognition running, roughly, from Plato up to Spinoza and Leibniz (and perhaps even Kant) and starting from the idea that human beings are, at least to some extent, capable of articulating or grasping the basic order of reality. This commitment typically comes with a robust view of our basic cognitive relation to reality—of reality "determin[ing] one's cognition", as John Carriero puts it in his landmark study of Descartes's *Meditations* (2009, 313). A powerful version of this view is the Aristotelian proposal that through sensory cognition we become "formally identical" to the objects cognized.

From this perspective, the skeptical doubt presented in the First Meditation does not mark a new skeptical turn, but is rather just a *tool* that Descartes uses to undermine *some* aspects of the Aristotelian view. Carriero argues that while the Aristotelian sense-based theory is rejected by Descartes, some of the core tenets of the Aristotelian conception of cognition are retained within his new doctrine of innate ideas. On Carriero's reading, ideas for Descartes are not inner mental objects, but are actually to be understood in terms of the Aristotelian notion of formal identity. For Descartes, as for Aristotelians, cognition involves, as Carriero puts it, "the existence of some mind-independent structure, form, in the soul" (*ibid*., 18); it is a matter of "sameness of structure in the cognizer and the cognized" (*ibid*., 158).

While we are sympathetic to the suggestion that Descartes retains a traditional conception of cognition as "determination by reality", we also believe that it faces important difficulties. More specifically, we will argue that the claim that Descartes's view is akin to the Aristotelian doctrine of formal identity is problematic. The reason is that it is hard to see how the notion of formal identity could do the work it is supposed to do—i.e., constitute a robust cognitive connection to reality—given that Descartes's understanding of the basic structure of reality departs radically from the Aristotelian view. Instead of seeing him as retaining the Aristotelian doctrine, we propose that his philosophical project is better framed as an attempt to give a *new* account of what it is for a cognizer to be determined by reality within a world that looks fundamentally different from the Aristotelian one.

We do not want to claim, however, that Descartes has a fully worked-out alternative. In fact, by examining his discussion of the innate ideas of extension and of God, we will see that there are important problems left open, partly having to do with differences in how we are cognitively related to extension and God, respectively. What Descartes leaves to his early modern successors is only the beginnings of an account, including some deep difficulties that have to be addressed in order to salvage the conception of cognition as determination by reality. This is important not only for better appreciating Descartes, but also, as we will see, because it offers a novel approach to Spinoza and Leibniz. Some of their—at least from our contemporary perspective—more bewildering views, such as the central role they give to God in accounting for cognition, can be seen as resulting from their attempt to tackle the difficulties inherent in Descartes's theory.

We will proceed as follows. We begin, in section 1, by giving a brief outline of the Aristotelian view of cognition. In section 2, we consider Descartes's relation to the Aristotelian view, and introduce Carriero's sameness-of-structure reading. In section 3, we take up some problems with the sameness-of-structure reading, focusing on the special cognitive role Descartes gives to the innate idea of extension. In section 4, we turn to Descartes's account of the idea of God, stressing the importance of our metaphysical dependence on God for understanding the nature of this idea. Doing so serves to highlight what seems to be an unresolved issue within Descartes's theory of cognition. We end by indicating how bringing this issue into view can help us to better appreciate the importance of God in Spinoza's and Leibniz's accounts of cognition.

1. The Aristotelian View of Cognition

In order to locate the differences between Descartes's account of our cognitive relation to reality and the Aristotelian one we will here offer a brief sketch of the latter. Since these differences, as we will see in more detail

below, have to do with differences in their conceptions of the reality understood, it will be helpful to begin with a reminder of the basic traits of the Aristotelian hylomorphic metaphysics.

For Aristotelians, individual substances are composites of form and matter, where the nature of any individual exemplifies a kind-essence.[2] By 'kind-essence' we mean the idea that individual substances in some sense share a common nature: the respective natures of Fido and Spot are both constituted by caninehood, and similarly the respective natures of Socrates and Plato are both constituted by humanity.[3] To say that a kind-essence constitutes the nature of an individual is to say that that essence is the individual's principle of operation—the ground for its *propria*, especially its basic powers. These powers are powers for acquiring various accidents, including the so-called sensible forms, for example colors, heat, and cold.

There is a natural route from this picture of reality to the Aristotelian thesis that understanding has to do with universality or commonality. Understanding is a matter of grasping the causal structure of the world. To understand reality is thus to understand kind-essences, that is, something that is common to several individuals, since kind-essences are the basic causal principles. This means that, for Aristotelians, the importance of commonality or universality does not have to do with categorizing the world so as to make it intelligible to us—it is not, as we may think, primarily a matter of classification, of subsuming individual objects under concepts. The Aristotelian genus-species schema (traditionally expressed in the so-called *Porphyrian tree*) is a consequence of the fact that the causal fabric is constituted by kind-essences.

There also seems to be a rather natural route from the Aristotelian conception of reality to the view of the senses as providing our basic cognitive access to it. Kind-essences are what explain why substances are capable of taking on various sensible forms, the various features of the world that we meet in our sensory experience. By reflecting on the way in which the world appears to us we are thus able to grasp the underlying principles ultimately responsible for those features.

What we are in sensory contact with are particular material things such as Fido, but to understand Fido's basic principles is not to understand something that is particular to Fido, but something that is common to other dogs as well, caninehood *as such*. So how do we get to caninehood from various experiences of particular dogs? The Aristotelian answer famously involves the idea that our sensory cognition of Fido takes place via receiving sensible species, which are retained or stored as phantasms in the common sense. The intellect then abstracts from the material aspects of phantasms, thus producing an intelligible species. Caninehood exists in one way in Fido, in another way in the sensible species and phantasms, and is finally cognized in its "pure" form, as universal, by the intellect; in understanding the intellect becomes "formally identical"

with, or comes to "resemble", the reality understood (Carriero 2009, 137; cf. Pasnau 2002, chap. 10).

To make sense of this line of thought, it is important to keep in mind that the Aristotelian theory is an attempt to work out the traditional view of understanding (*scientia*) as a matter of articulating the basic structure of reality, where doing so involves, as noted, a robust cognitive connection to reality.[4] By this we mean that our cognition is determined by reality in the sense that it involves a *direct* cognitive access to the reality cognized, as opposed to its being mediated by, say, representations or categorizations on the part of the cognizer. From a contemporary perspective, it may not be obvious why this needs to be so: why would it not be possible for us to reach an understanding of the structure of reality even though our cognitive access to it is mediated? Part of the issue here may have to do with the fact that it seems natural for us to think of understanding or theorizing about reality as itself a fairly mediated affair—we access reality via theoretical representations or models. In contrast, on the traditional view, understanding is not just a matter of having law-like empirical generalizations, but of directly explicating the structure of reality, in the way that for Aristotelians the grasp of an essence allows us to articulate the powers depending on that essence. The view of sensation as the transmission of sensible species, and the related idea of abstraction from phantasms, is then supposed to explain how this direct availability of essence is possible. What makes it at least in principle possible for us to understand the basic structure of reality is that we in cognizing reality become formally identical to the very reality understood.

2. Descartes's Relation to the Aristotelian Account

Let us now turn to Descartes. We will begin by outlining and motivating the central thesis of the novel approach to his philosophy: that while rejecting many elements of the Aristotelian view, he nevertheless keeps the core idea that our ability to understand is grounded in a robust cognitive connection to reality. We will not, however, attempt a detailed defense of this line of interpretation against a more traditional "internalist" reading. Secondly, we will present Carriero's claim that Descartes even retains something like the Aristotelian notion of formal identity.

It is of course impossible to read the *Meditations* without being struck by Descartes's hostility to the Aristotelian view of the senses and the understanding as working neatly in tandem. For Descartes the senses and the imagination are not necessary first steps in a process leading to an understanding of the nature of things, but rather appear to be primarily sources of error and confusion. Our sensory experience does not, as for Aristotelians, give us immediate access to sensible forms, since such forms simply do not belong to corporeal reality. According to the mechanistic view, all the variety in the corporeal world is a matter of complex

variations of the fundamental modes of body: size, shape, and motion. This means that a project such as the Aristotelian one, which takes understanding to be a matter of abstracting from the senses must, from Descartes's perspective, be misguided.

What does Descartes's alternative look like? Real material structures for him are geometric-kinematic structures, and so understanding material things mechanistically means understanding them in geometric terms.[5] This is why, in accounting for our cognition of material things, he focuses on geometrical cognition. For Descartes the latter is innate—not something we acquire through our senses. This means that to get clear about the natures of things, the intellect must rely on the innate ideas it contains, instead of beginning from the senses.

Consider, for example, Descartes's famous case of the two ideas of the sun in the Third Meditation. One idea of the sun is based on the senses and is inadequate, in some sense false. The other one is what provides understanding of what the nature of the sun is. This idea, Descartes says, is "based on astronomical reasoning" and is "derived from certain notions which are innate in me" (AT 7, 39; CSM 2, 27). Similarly, in the Second Meditation wax example, the lesson is that the nature of the piece of wax is something to which we can have cognitive access only by leaving aside the senses and the imagination; it is something that is, as Descartes says, "perceived by the mind alone"; it is a case of "purely mental scrutiny" (AT 7, 31; CSM 2, 21). This is not to say that the senses have no role to play at all. Even if Descartes is not explicit about this, one might think that the point of emphasizing the innate character of the idea of the piece of wax or the sun is *not* to say that we could arrive at a cognition of them entirely through our intellect. The senses may very well be needed so that the understanding can, as Carriero puts it, "lock on to" some particular thing (2009, 112). The point is just that the senses do not contribute to our *understanding* of the thing's nature.

What does the thesis of the innateness of geometry amount to? It is important to avoid the temptation to think that Descartes's emphasis on innate ideas and "pure mental scrutiny" leads to a picture of genuine cognition as based on some sort of conceptual analysis. Descartes's notion of innate idea is very different from the modern notion of concept as something under which several individuals are subsumed.[6] What is important about innate ideas is that they provide cognitive access to mind-independent realities, as comes out in the following key passage from the Fifth Meditation:

> But I think the most important consideration at this point is that I find within me countless ideas of things which even though they may not exist anywhere outside me still cannot be called nothing; for although in a sense they can be thought of at will, they are not my invention but have their own true and immutable natures. When, for

> example, I imagine a triangle, even if perhaps no such figure exists, or has ever existed, anywhere outside my thought, there is still a determinate nature, or essence, or form of the triangle which is immutable and eternal, and not invented by me or dependent on my mind. This is clear from the fact that various properties can be demonstrated of the triangle, for example that its three angles equal two right angles, that its greatest side subtends its greatest angle, and the like; and since these properties are ones which I now clearly recognize whether I want it or not, even if I never thought of them at all when I previously imagined the triangle, it follows that they cannot have been invented by me.
>
> (AT 7, 64; CSM 2, 44–45)

Notice that for Descartes it is part of the nature of my thinking of a triangle that in having the idea of a triangle, I am immediately related to some *thing* (*res*), something real, something that is independent of myself, and it is my access to this thing that constrains me in my geometrical thinking. Such cognition based on ideas that "I find within me" has substantive character: in seeing that a triangle is a three-sided closed figure on a single plane, I am also able to *demonstrate further properties* of the triangle, such as the property that its internal angles sum to two right angles (Carriero 2009, 300–01).[7] Descartes denies that our ability to cognize essences is possible only through abstracting from the senses. In his view, our access to mind-independent natures is not based on the senses but on the very make-up of our minds. Despite this difference Descartes's discussion of innate ideas of geometry suggests that he still thinks of cognition fundamentally along the same lines as the Aristotelians, as involving a direct cognitive relation to reality.[8]

Support for such a reading can also be found in Descartes's general account of ideas. In the *Meditations*, he introduces the term 'idea' in the course of preparing the reader for his (first) proof of God's existence in the Third Meditation. To do so Descartes thinks it is necessary to say something about how we should classify our thoughts "into definite kinds" (AT 7, 36; CSM 2, 25). He claims, rather notoriously, that he is going to use the term 'idea' to refer to those thoughts that "are as it were the images of things" (AT 7, 37; CSM 2, 25). Yet comparing ideas to images does not seem very helpful: after all, the most important examples of ideas for Descartes are those of myself, God, and extension. The fact that Descartes uses the term 'idea' in classifying "thoughts" suggests that ideas are some kind of mental states, but even this turns out to be far from obvious. Later in the Third Meditation Descartes does say that ideas can be considered as "simply modes of thought", but it is crucial to his proof of God's existence that there is also another way to consider them—besides "formal reality" as modes of thought, ideas also

have what Descartes calls *objective reality* or *objective being* (we take Descartes to use these terms more or less interchangeably) (AT 7, 40; CSM 2, 28). Sometimes Descartes even reserves 'idea' for the latter, as in his First Replies:

> The idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect—not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect. Now this mode of being is of course much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect; but, as I did explain, it is not therefore simply nothing.
>
> (AT 7, 102; CSM 2, 75)

Here my having an idea of the sun is a matter of the sun's somehow existing "in" me. This is not to say that the sun as formally existing—as it exists in the heavens—comes to be in me, but the point is that when I think of the sun it acquires an objective mode of being in addition to its formal being. Perhaps we should then distinguish between two senses of 'idea' in Descartes. In the *wide* sense, an idea would be an act of the mind that has some reality as its object—e.g. in the sun case, the idea would be the act of the mind that has the sun as its object. In the *narrow* sense (which is the one used in the passage just quoted), an idea would be the objective being of the thing cognized.

On the previously widespread internalist interpretation, Descartes was thought to hold that ideas are mental representations that are *independent* of external reality. Yet it is noteworthy that even the notion of a mental representation as something that is *distinct* from, and *through which* we access, external reality does not obviously figure into Descartes's account here.[9] An idea in the narrow sense—the objective reality—is a mode of being of the object cognized, not of the mind. On the face of it then, the way in which Descartes elaborates the notion of idea suggests that he is thinking of cognition precisely along the lines of the traditional conception of cognition as involving a direct relation between the cognizer and the reality understood. Perhaps one can even say that for Descartes to have an idea (in the wide sense) is to be directly cognitively related to some external reality.

What then is the nature of that relation? According to Carriero, Descartes's view is best understood in terms of something like the Aristotelian notion of formal identity:[10]

> In general the way ideas function for Descartes is that they make reality available to the mind. That is, all ideas—whether purely intellectual (such as my idea of myself or of God) or imaginative (such as my idea of a chimera or my visualization of a triangle) or sensory (such as my idea of greenness)—exhibit or present reality to the

> mind: the reality contained in the thing that is being thought of exists objectively in the idea. [. . .] In certain respects, this sameness-of-reality assumption functions the way that formal identity or the resemblance thesis does for the Aristotelians. Both understand cognition as a matter of sameness of structure in the cognizer and the cognized.
>
> (Carriero 2009, 158)

This suggestion of course raises many questions. One has to do with Carriero's claim that also sensory cognition and even imagination can be understood in terms of sameness of structure. Here we want to set these difficult cases aside and focus on understanding. For it seems natural to wonder how it is possible for Descartes to retain an Aristotelian theory of cognition, while, as we saw, abandoning the hylomorphic picture which seems to underpin it. How is it possible to retain something like formal identity without Aristotelian substantial forms?

It is here that the notion of structure is important. This notion seems to be quite naturally at home in Descartes's geometrical picture. There is also an important connection between the case of geometrical structure and the traditional notion of essence, as comes up in Descartes discussion in the Fifth Meditation. The properties of the triangle depend on its true and immutable nature very much in the same the way in which propria were thought to depend on an essence (Carriero 2009, 301). At a more general level, one might think that the notion of structure is quite useful for the present purpose. It is a notion which is not tied to any particular metaphysics, and it is at the same time not so unnatural to use it in a way that connects it to the Aristotelian forms: a structure is something abstract that can be realized in many different ways, so it seems that we could also say that a structure can in some sense be present both in the world and in the intellect. Thus, there is a sense in which we can say that the cognizer in thinking of a triangle, understood as a geometrical structure, comes to have that structure in her intellect. That is, we can account for the sort of direct cognitive access that a cognizer has to the objects of geometry in terms of the notion of sameness of structure. This is how we understand Carriero's claim that Descartes, while rejecting the abstractionist doctrine in favor of the doctrine of innate ideas, still can retain something like a conception of cognition as grounded in formal identity.

It is natural to ask whether the notion of sameness of structure really generalizes to other innate ideas, most importantly to that of God. We will return to the idea of God in section 5 of this chapter, but first we would like to draw attention to some difficulties with Carriero's sameness-of-structure approach that arise already at the level of our cognition of material things.

3. Problems with the Sameness-of-Structure Reading

According to Carriero's sameness-of-structure reading, Descartes (just as Aristotelians) thinks that human understanding is capable of cognitive access to reality in the sense that the real structures of things come to exist in the understanding. It is, of course, clear that for Descartes the nature of these real structures has to be quite different from Aristotelian kind-essences. The structure, at least in the case of material things, must in Descartes's view be something like geometric-kinetic structure. We will now take up some questions concerning how to explicate this idea.

If structure is something that things "have" and that can also be "had" by the intellect, this might suggest that a structure is something like a universal capable of being instantiated by several things at the same time—in line with how structure is often understood today, for example, in the philosophy of mathematics.[11] Yet for Descartes it is not a universal abstracted from things that is supposed to be present in our mind in cognition. Indeed, in Descartes's discussion of our idea of the sun it is the thing itself, the sun, which exists in the mind, objectively. This in fact reflects a further important difference between the new mechanistic metaphysics and an Aristotelian world-view, emphasized by Carriero. The Aristotelian conception of natures as kind-essences, as common to several particular substances, is replaced by a conception of natures themselves as particular:

> [I]f one thinks of physical beings as complex patterns of extension in motion, as Descartes does, it does not seem at all unnatural that one might focus one's intellectual attention on *this* system and try to understand it, without regard to other similar systems.
>
> (Carriero 2009, 124)

It may still be that classifying things—putting them into classes on the basis of similarities—is important for cognizers like us, but in this new picture doing so is not really fundamental to understanding the natures of things. Indeed, a general distrust of the notion of universal is an important theme in all early modern rationalists. Think here, for example, of Spinoza's account of "notions called 'universals' " as arising "when so many images are formed in the human body simultaneously (e.g. of man) that our capacity to imagine them is surpassed" (EII P40s1).

Now, one might wonder how such an emphasis on particularity fits with the discussion of true and immutable natures in the Fifth Meditation (considered in section 3 of this chapter). It is easy to get the impression that these natures are precisely something common—the true and immutable nature of a triangle as something that is instantiated by all triangles. Here it is, however, important to note that all the true and immutable natures, when we are talking about corporeal reality, depend in a certain

way on extension, according to Descartes, as is brought out by Carriero's expression "complex patterns of extension in motion" in the quote above.[12] All different figures (bodies) are ultimately just different ways of being extended, different ways of modifying extension, and to understand any of them is to understand them through the idea of extension. To think of the true and immutable nature of e.g. a triangle is to think of extension as delimited in a certain way, along the lines of a construction within Euclidean space.

This is also the point Descartes makes in the Fifth Meditation in responding to the suggestion that we could have received the idea of a triangle from the senses (via seeing bodies of a triangular shape): "I can think up countless other shapes which there can be no suspicion of my ever having encountered through the senses, and yet I can demonstrate various properties of these shapes" (AT 7, 65; CSM 2, 45). What allows me to think about the true and immutable nature of a triangle is that I have the idea of extension, an idea that also allows me to construe innumerable other figures. The idea of extension is an idea of something *giving rise to* a set of possible structures.

Here we find what we could call an *architectonic difference* between Aristotelian abstractionism and the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas. For Aristotelians, kind-essences form our "cognitive bedrock" : by acquiring an essence we are able to see how propria follow. There is no further level of construction of essences: we could not start out with matter, because matter itself is pure potentiality, in need of addition of forms. Nor could we start out with something like the highest genus substance and from there construct sub-genera (living and non-living), since moving from genus to species requires adding *differentiae*. In contrast, a common idea in early modern thought, is that the nature of extension is "rich", something that gives rise to the infinite variety of possible shapes or figures, or possible patterns of motion.

If this is correct, we should ask, what is the status of extension itself and how should we understand our cognitive relation to extension? Descartes explains in a letter to Arnauld that extension is "a nature which takes on all shapes", by which he does not mean that all shapes somehow emanate from extension. The point has rather to do with the *richness* of extension: all the possible shapes are limitations of extension and thinking about some particular shape is to think about extension as limited in a certain way. Extension is, as he stresses, "a particular nature [*naturam particularem*]", in contrast to "some universal which includes all modes" (AT V, 221; CSMK, 357), i.e., it is not like a genus that includes all shapes as its species, but is rather something particular that has shapes as its modifications. However we are to work out the details here,[13] Descartes's main point seems clear: when we are doing Euclidean geometry, it is natural to think of space not as a universal but as something particular, which constrains the constructions that can be made in it.

This brings us back to the question of how to understand the status of the true and immutable natures—of geometrical structures. Given that these are supposed to be, as we have just seen, ways of modifying (delimiting) extension, and extension itself is something particular, it may be less strange to think of these structures themselves as particular. (Or perhaps the traditional distinction between universals and particulars is actually difficult to apply to Descartes's account of corporeal reality.) In any case, there may not be any deep tension between the idea that understanding is directly of *this* or *that* thing, and the idea that the basis of understanding is sameness-of-structure, along the lines proposed by Carriero. When we understand the sun, what we understand is some very complex pattern of matter in motion, and for us to have an understanding of it is for that pattern to in some way be replicated in our minds.

But even if we can make sense of this line of thought in the case of cognition of different geometric-kinetic structures, it is not clear that it can hold of all of our ideas, as Carriero suggests that it does (see section 2 in this chapter). It seems, for example, problematic to claim that our cognitive access to extension can be construed in terms of sameness of structure. As we saw, the idea that geometrical structures are themselves particulars relies on the idea that they are limitations or modifications of the particular nature of extension. But if extension is to play that role, extension itself cannot be understood as a structure in the same sense as other geometrical structures, but it must have a special status. In that case, it is not clear how our idea of extension, our direct cognitive relation to extension—which is the basis for our understanding of material things—could be explained in terms of sameness of structure.

One possibility is that Descartes could have a sort of two-stage story of our cognition. Given that we can take our cognitive access to one particular, namely extension, as given, we could give an account of our cognitive access to the structures which are grounded in that particular. But that would, of course, leave our cognitive access to extension unexplained. Should we then just say that in the case of the innate idea of extension we have reached a sort of ground level in our cognitive apparatus?

This response would be disappointing if, as Carriero proposes, Descartes is to be interpreted in line with an Aristotelian account of our cognitive relation to reality. For it is central to the Aristotelian view that in understanding we are not only directly related to the object understood, but that there is a ground for, an account of, that relation, which, as we saw, for Aristotelians is given by the intellect's being formally identical to its object. If the latter account is not available to Descartes in the case of the idea of extension—as we have suggested—the only further thing we could introduce here would be something like the perfection of God which would guarantee that even in the case of the idea of extension we are dealing with something real, something which is not just a peculiar

feature of our cognitive apparatus. But it is not clear to what extent this really would count as an account (in the Aristotelian sense) of our cognitive relation to reality—what God's perfection guarantees is *that* there is such a relation, but it does not tell us anything about its ground.

A similar problem arises with respect to another of our basic innate ideas, namely the idea of God. This too is an idea of a particular nature and it seems thus difficult to explain it in terms of sameness of structure. But while it is unclear to us whether Descartes has anything further to say about the idea of extension, his discussion of the idea of God does in fact contain at least some initial suggestions for an alternative account of this idea. Yet rather than a solution to the difficulties with the idea of extension, we encounter here a deep and unresolved problem in Descartes's theory. For the account of our idea of God does not, as we will see, seem to be available in the case of the idea of extension.

4. The Role and Nature of the Idea of God

That we have a clear and distinct idea of God is, of course, extremely important for Descartes's overall project in the *Meditations*. In the Fifth Meditation, Descartes moves from general observations concerning true and immutable natures to his second proof of God's existence by saying that "[c]ertainly, the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being, is one which I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number" (AT 7, 65; CSM 2, 45). The idea of God is rich in the same way as the idea of extension: just as the latter enables us to derive and cognize all kinds of geometrical truths concerning triangles and other figures, the former makes it possible for us to understand, at least to some extent, the nature of God (and thereby the nature of reality).

Carriero emphasizes the way the knowledge of God is required in order to establish "the truth rule", the claim that "whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true" (AT 7, 35; CSM 2, 24). This rule is something we need in order to convince ourselves even of the veracity of our innate ideas of true and immutable natures. Ultimately then Descartes's account of cognition comes to rest on a metaphysical account of God and our relation to God:

> Notice that Descartes bases his argument for these things' being *verae* and "something, and not merely nothing" on the "truth rule," and so on a substantive metaphysical account of the origin of my nature in God.
>
> (Carriero 2009, 58)

Referring to God helps us to answer certain fundamental questions that we can raise about our ideas. These questions, such as "Does my idea of extension 'work' as it should?", or in general "Do my innate ideas function

so as to make real structure available to the mind?" are possible because there is, as Carriero puts it, "enough distance" between the object and the idea, even in the case of the most fundamental ideas that we have (*ibid*.). This distance allows us to raise what we could, following Kant, characterize as a *quaestio iuris* concerning our ideas: even if some idea seems inevitable for us, we can still ask whether this inevitability is just a peculiar feature of our own faculty of cognition. And we can answer that question, i.e., we can ultimately see that our ideas are doing what they are supposed to be doing, when we, by relying on our idea of God, come to know that our cognitive faculties come from God and that God is not a deceiver.

We believe that Carriero's emphasis on the central role of our origin in God to Descartes's account of cognition is a very important insight. However, we believe that it can also be developed in a somewhat different, less traditional, direction—it is not only relevant to the *quaestio iuris* but also to understanding the nature of the idea of God in the first place. To see this, we need to consider some aspects of Descartes's intricate discussion in the Third Meditation, in connection with his first attempt to prove the existence of God. The proof involves centrally the claim that the reality which exists objectively in our idea of God is of such a kind that the only possible source of this idea is God, that is, an actually infinite perfect being. It may seem natural to read this along the lines of Carriero's sameness-of-structure account, as he himself also proposes: "our idea of God functions in a manner analogous to the way an intelligible species did for the scholastics" (Carriero 2009, 183). We believe, however, that we can find another strand in the Third Meditation discussion. Consider the following passage:

> I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself. For how could I understand that I doubted or desired—that is, lacked something—and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects in comparison.
>
> (AT 7, 45–46; CSM 2, 31)

Descartes is here concerned with the fact that God is the ultimate infinite reality on which I, as a finite thing, depend, which makes the idea of God prior to the idea of myself. I understand myself *through* the idea of God.[14] Descartes goes on to elaborate as follows on the consequences of this for understanding the nature of my idea of God:

> And indeed it is no surprise that God, in creating me, should have placed this idea [the idea of God] in me to be, as it were, the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work—not that the mark need be

> anything distinct from the work itself. But the mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness, and that I perceive that likeness, which includes the idea of God, by the same faculty which enables me to perceive myself.
>
> (AT 7, 51; CSM 2, 35)

This passage raises some important and difficult questions about how to understand the notion of idea. For Carriero, as we have seen, an idea involves the presence of structure in the intellect. This is what explains what it is for the cognizer to have a direct relationship to that reality (in this case God). But it is not obvious to us that this is how we should read the passage. At first sight, one may of course think that what Descartes says here fits with Carriero's proposal. In creating me, God is said to "have placed" the idea of Himself in me; my likeness to God "includes the idea of God". It may seem natural to construe this in terms of "divine structure" coming to exist (objectively) in me.

Yet the passage also contains a qualification that we think is actually quite important and which we take to suggest something different. The qualification comes in Descartes's remark that "the mark" (the idea) need not be "anything distinct from the work itself" (not distinct from the created mind). This suggests that it is not so clear that there is anything more needed to have an idea of God than being created by God. But what is then the nature of the idea? That is, what is it that is supposed to explain my standing in a direct cognitive relation to God?

Somewhat speculatively, we propose that having an idea of God has to do with the sort of *dependence* that Descartes stresses between God and created minds. Instead of thinking of my cognitive relation to God as based on some further "divine structure" in me, what accounts for my being able to directly access God's nature would have to do with the "metaphysical directness" involved in my being created by, originating from, God. The appeal to the origin of our nature in God here differs from the way God is introduced in response to the *quaestio iuris*. What is important in this context is not that God is not a deceiver, but that our origin in God somehow explains our ability to cognize God in the first place.

Note, however, that the new picture of the nature of the idea of God (as based on our immediate metaphysical dependence on God) cannot help us to understand our cognitive relation to extension: it is a key tenet of Descartes's view that as a thinking being the mind does *not* originate from extension. In the case of God I can, as it were, immediately see how the reality cognized—the divine being—is in me, due to my sense of metaphysical dependence on God. But there is no corresponding sense of dependence on extension. That is, in the case of my idea of extension there seems to be some room for skepticism, and a

need for what we characterized as a *quaestio iuris*. Connectedly, we can also see why the idea of God, given its special character, can play a role in answering the *quaestio iuris*.

How exactly to work out the details here may in the end be left open by Descartes. Rather than proposing a definitive account of Descartes's position, we believe that part of the value of attending to the new picture of what it is to be cognitively related to reality that emerges in the Third Meditation, is that it helps to appreciate the way in which Descartes's main rationalist successors, Spinoza and Leibniz, develop the Cartesian framework. By way of conclusion, we would like to briefly indicate how our reading of Descartes may contribute to a better understanding of the—at least from our perspective—alien role they give to God in accounting for the nature of cognition.

5. Concluding Remarks: The Role of the Idea of God in Spinoza and Leibniz

Spinoza famously proposes that "each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God" (EII P45). Now, if any singular thing needs to be conceived or understood through God's essence, it seems that our being able to understand anything relies on our having a cognition of God's essence. This is precisely what Spinoza goes on to claim that we have: "the human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence" (EII P47).

Leibniz develops a similar line of thought.[15] In arguing that our cognition bottoms out in irresolvable notions, he identifies these notions with the absolute attributes of God, with the fundamental aspects of God's being:

> I won't venture to determine whether people can ever produce a perfect analysis of their notions or whether they can ever reduce their thoughts to primitive possibilities or to irresolvable notions or (what comes to the same thing) to the absolute attributes of God, indeed to the first causes and the ultimate reasons for things.
>
> (A VI.iv 590; AG 26)

Thus, for Leibniz too conceiving of (having a notion of) God's essence is the basis for conceiving (having a notion of) anything else.[16] While rejecting Spinoza's substance monism, Leibniz shares Spinoza's view that the natures of finite things are to be understood in terms of limitations of God's "absolute being", in analogy with the relation between space and shape: the absolute being, he writes in a 1715 letter, "differs from particular limited beings as absolute and boundless space differs from a circle or a square" (RML 481; W 556).

The idea of God in both Spinoza and Leibniz thus in a way becomes even more central to our cognitive life than it is for Descartes: all our cognition needs to rest on the cognition of God's being. Of course, Spinoza and Leibniz develop this thought in very different ways: Spinoza by making God extended, and Leibniz by arguing that the attribute of extension is not a fundamental attribute.

This "unificatory" move, with the result that a cognitive access to God becomes a precondition for having any cognitive relation to reality, is also what can make the systems of Spinoza and Leibniz seem rather strange from our contemporary vantage point. Here we believe that it helps to keep in mind some of the problems registered earlier about understanding the nature of the innate idea of extension in Descartes. We also saw that in the case of our idea of God Descartes offers the beginning of what looks like an alternative account of the nature of ideas, having to do with the special metaphysical dependence involved in our originating from God. In this way, our reading of Descartes allows us to see why Spinoza and Leibniz would have found the unificatory move philosophically attractive. By making all ideas depend on the idea of God, explained in terms of our metaphysical dependence on God, the distance between ideas and reality—calling for a *quaestio iuris*—seems to vanish. Descartes still felt the need to answer the skeptic by emphasizing that God is not a deceiver. In contrast, Spinoza and Leibniz seem little troubled by skeptical considerations. In fact, it is easy to get the impression that they are more concerned with the opposite problem. For them the acute problem is not how we are able to get onto the truth, but how we can ever be mistaken, that is, how cognitive error is possible.[17]

Notes

1 See e.g. Carriero 2009; Alanen 2003; Brown 2006; Normore 2003. Other important aspects of this shift concern for example Descartes's view of the mind-body union.

2 The terms we use here, 'exemplification' and 'instantiation', should not be understood in their most straightforward contemporary sense, as referring to a relation between a particular object (e.g. Fido) and a property (e.g. brownness). The exact relationship between the individual and the kind-essence was of course a vexed matter within the scholastic Aristotelian tradition. Here we present a broadly Thomistic view, drawing on Carriero's detailed, and in our view both plausible and philosophically interesting, account (Carriero 2009, especially 11–21). Our aim is not, however, to take a stand on the details of interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy, but we limit ourselves to engage Carriero's interpretation over the question of whether Descartes shares some of the Aristotelian tenets as presented by Carriero.

3 As Pasnau notes, the general thrust of Aquinas's position seems to be that "beneath the accidents lie a common kernel, the quiddity of the object, qualitatively the same even if it is not numerically the same", even though working out the details of what this means raises "numerous and deep" difficulties (Pasnau 2002, 301–02).

4 For a further discussion of the traditional notion of understanding, see Carriero 2016, 134ff. Cf. Burnyeat 2012.
5 For a helpful discussion of the importance of geometry to early modern rationalist metaphysics (in particular Spinoza), see Viljanen 2011.
6 Here we differ from a tendency in the literature to treat innate ideas as concepts, having general content (see e.g. Newman 2005, 181). Our reading draws on the one developed by Carriero 2009, chap. 5.
7 Note that the fact that the idea of a triangle—or of any other geometrical figure—is something that we construct (as we will discuss in more detail in section 3 of this chapter) is compatible with its being innate. In his reply to Hobbes, Descartes explains that "when we say that an idea is innate in us, we do not mean that it is always there before us. This would mean that no idea was innate. We simply mean that we have within ourselves the faculty of summoning up the idea" (AT 7, 189; CSM 2, 132).
8 It is natural to wonder whether the view of geometrical essences as realities commits Descartes to a form of Platonism. We will not be able to address this much-debated question in detail. It seems to us, however, that when we look more closely at Descartes's account of the ontological status of geometrical essences—as we will do in the next section—it turns out to differ in important respects from Platonism, at least as it is commonly understood.
9 Descartes of course talks of ideas as "representing" (e.g. AT 7, 40; CSM 2, 28). It is not clear, however, that this talk is to be understood in the nowadays common sense of involving a distinct mental item. Perhaps 'representing' can be taken in a more literal sense, in line with the notion of objective reality, as simply meaning that the external object is "present again", that is, has another mode of being. While we are not able to elaborate this suggestion here, it seems to us that it would make better sense of the way in which Descartes uses 'representing' in the context of his famous "causal principle" in the Third Meditation. On the other hand, one may still think that Descartes *needs* something like our modern notion of representation to make his theory of cognition work (for discussion of some of the difficulties here, see Brown 2006, chap. 4).
10 Sometimes, however, Carriero reserves 'formal identity' for the Aristotelian idea that our sensory cognition "resembles" external reality, a doctrine that Descartes rejects (Carriero 2009, 159). This is to be distinguished from 'formal identity' in the sense relevant here, namely the general sameness-of-structure thesis. When we talk of 'formal identity' it is in the latter sense that we use it.
11 For a helpful discussion of the notion of structure in contemporary philosophy of mathematics, see Shapiro 2000, chap. 10.
12 This seems to be part of Descartes's point in his well-known discussion of the piece of wax in the Second Meditation (AT 7, 30–31; CSM 2, 20–21). See Koistinen 2014.
13 For further discussion see Pasnau 2011, 152–54. We owe the reference to the letter to Arnauld to Alanen (Forthcoming), who discusses the way in which thought is a particular nature.
14 This is also something discussed at length in Carriero 2009, chap. 3(II). We differ, however, from Carriero in proposing that this dependence on God serves to *explain* the *nature* of the idea of God.
15 Malebranche's thesis that we see all things "in" God is another example of this way of developing Descartes's position.
16 We discuss this claim further in Myrdal and Repo 2016.
17 We would like to thank Martina Reuter for very helpful detailed comments on an earlier version of this essay. We have also benefitted from comments

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6 Spinoza's Three Kinds of Cognition

Imagination, Understanding, and Definition and Essence[1]

John Carriero

In several of his writings Spinoza sketches a picture of cognition as falling under three main heads.[2] In the *Ethics*, he labels these imagination, reason, and intuition. I am interested in how Spinoza sees the higher two forms of cognition, reason and intuition. Together they provide, in effect, his take on the classical idea of *episteme* or *scientia*.[3] What does such cognition look like for Spinoza?

This may seem a difficult question to answer, as Spinoza concedes in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TIE): "the things I have so far been able to know by [the highest] kind of knowledge have been very few" (§22).[4] And it must be admitted, I think, that at least since Plato *episteme* or *scientia* is more an idea than a reality. A sign of this, perhaps, is the paucity of examples of "real definitions" (that is, *logoi* or accounts that deliver genuine understanding) throughout the ancient and medieval period. Practically the only example one finds is the account of a human being as *rational animal*.

The 17th century, however, is an exciting time for *episteme*. Even if, as Spinoza concedes, the results have thus far been modest, it feels as if we are finally getting glimpses of genuine *episteme* and, along with it, a much better picture of what it would be to have a systematic understanding of reality. In fact, I believe that by working through clues provided in the TIE we may achieve a reasonably concrete picture of what Spinoza has in view. Often these clues concern *definition* and *essence*. This is because the highest form of cognition concerns *understanding*, which involves grasping the world's *intelligible* structure—that is, the essences of things—and, in this context, a *definition* is a perspicuous account of an intelligible structure or *essence*.

As will emerge, there is much continuity between Spinoza's picture of the highest form of cognition and the picture found in the Aristotelian tradition. There are also striking differences. Roughly, Spinoza's picture is much more mathematical than discursive, which separates it in important ways from both the Aristotelian tradition and more modern views. Recognizing this in turn helps us better see how Spinoza's necessitarianism works.[5]

1. Three Kinds of Cognition

Although Spinoza's threefold division of cognition is stable across his writings, I focus on the early TIE presentation because it elucidates important points concerning definition and essence.[6] Here's how Spinoza introduces the lowest level of cognition (§19), which has two subvarieties:

1. There is the perception we have from report or from some conventional sign.

Spinoza gives as examples (§20) my knowledge of the date of my birth and of who my parents are.

2. There is the perception that we have from random experience, that is, experience that is not determined by the intellect. But it has this name only because it comes to us by chance [*casu sic occurrit*], and we have no other experience [*experimentum*] that opposes it. So it remains with us unshaken.

Spinoza gives as examples my knowledge that I shall die, my knowledge that oil feeds fire and water extinguishes fire, and my knowledge that a dog is a barking animal and man is a rational animal.

Now, one might think that the difference between the two types of cognition found at this lower level and the two higher levels is the same as that between what does not and what does count as "knowledge," in the sense of contemporary epistemology.[7] And Spinoza does, to be sure, think that a special certainty accompanies the higher forms of cognition: when I understand and see why something is the way it is, he thinks that I am certain and I know I cannot be mistaken (E2p43 and E2p43s). But Spinoza gives no sign of endorsing the surprising thesis that I do not really know when I was born or who my parents are, or that I do not really know that water extinguishes fire. And he writes of the lowest form of cognition that it is "in this way that I know [*novi*] almost all the things that are useful in life." The difference between the lower level and the higher levels lies elsewhere.

Let's turn to the two higher forms of cognition. Spinoza describes the second kind of cognition as follows:

3. There is the perception we have when the essence of a thing is inferred from another thing, but not adequately. This happens, either when we infer the cause from some effect, or when something is inferred from some universal, which some property always accompanies.

I am going to key on the idea that this cognition involves *essence*. More specifically, this cognition involves an inference from some feature of a

thing to its essence, so it corresponds to *a posteriori* cognition, in the pre-Kantian sense of *a posteriori*. It is "outside in" cognition, cognition from the surface to an underlying causal structure. That is, the cognition involves the movement from property (in the sense of *proprium*), effect, or consequence to essence, cause, or ground.

Spinoza gives several examples (in §21). One that I find especially helpful is this:

> we infer [one thing] from another in this way: after we clearly perceive that we feel such a body, and no other, then, I say, we infer clearly that the soul is united to the body, which union is the cause of such a sensation; but we cannot understand absolutely from this what that sensation and union are.[8]

Spinoza thinks that the fact of sensation shows that I am united to a body. He may even think that it tells me a little bit about *what* the soul is: namely, whatever the soul is—that is, whatever its essence turns out to be—it must be such that it grounds its union with the body. This alone, however, would make for a quite blank and abstract characterization of the mind's nature, as Spinoza emphasizes. In footnote *g*, he explains:

> For we understand nothing through that union except the sensation itself, that is, the effect, from which we inferred the cause, concerning which we understand nothing.

And in footnote *h*, Spinoza warns that although such conclusions are certain, they must be treated with "greatest care," because:

> When things are conceived so abstractly [*abstracte*], and not through their true essence, they are immediately confused by the imagination. . . . For to the things that they conceive abstractly [*abstracte*], separately, and confusedly, they give names which they use to signify other more familiar things.

Spinoza holds that while this kind of cognition *does* provide understanding, the understanding it provides is limited. Because the understanding of what the soul is is left mostly blank—because we do not conceive the soul through its "true essence"—it will be easy to forget that we have little more than a placeholder and begin to think that we understand more than we really do (as might happen if someone were to think that by positing a dormitive virtue she explained opium's putting people to sleep as opposed to laying down a placeholder). The blankness also encourages the mistake of associating with the soul all sorts of things that do not belong to it.

And here is how Spinoza characterizes the third kind of cognition:

4. Finally, there is the perception we have when a thing is perceived through its essence alone, or through knowledge of its proximate cause.

This kind of cognition is "inside out," in that it goes from the underlying basis to an outward feature. It is *a priori* cognition, again in the old sense, that is, from essence, cause, or ground to property, effect, or consequence. He gives a few examples. The one I find most helpful is this: "from the fact that I know the essence of the soul, I know that it is united to the body." If I know, for example, that *what* the (human) mind is is the idea of the (human) body within the infinite idea of God, then I'll see that the mind must be united to the body and how it is united (i.e., as an idea to its object).

We begin to see, then, how Spinoza's focus is different from that found in contemporary epistemology. What he particularly cares about is understanding, not knowledge in the sense of true, justified belief, or some suitably articulated successor notion. As noted, much of what is found at his bottom level of knowledge would count as knowledge in our sense. But for Spinoza it would be only "mere" knowledge, as we might put it.[9]

2. The Difference between Imagination and Understanding

2.1 Imagination

Although my focus is on understanding, I will begin, for contrastive purposes, with a discussion of Spinoza's views on imagination. I will draw on the *Ethics* to fill out this part of the picture.

My body exists in the plenum, along with other bodies. When other bodies bump into my body, they sometimes leave a dent in my brain. When this occurs, there is an idea of the brain dent in my mind. This follows from Spinoza's account of what the mind is, a difficult topic that, I presume, he wished to set aside for the purposes of the TIE. According to Spinoza, the nature of the dent is more a function of my body than of the foreign body (2p16c2), but, even so, the idea of the dent does "tell" me something about the foreign body (2p16c1; 2p17cs). The dents themselves, and so too the ideas of the dents, are associated in various ways. For example, if my body gets dented by light reflected from a piece of chocolate cake at the same time that my olfactory system is impacted by an aroma in the air, then the two images will be associated in my brain and the ideas of those images will be associated in my mind. I think this means, for example, that when I picture the cake on the table, I will also recall its aroma. Spinoza allows that the mechanisms he provides

are somewhat speculative, but thinks that they are good enough for his purposes, and suspects that they are not far from the truth (see 2p17cs).

Let's suppose my belief that oil feeds fire arises from casual experience, that is, from past associations of oil's being poured on fire with fire's increasing.[10] Spinoza's main idea seems clear enough: in such a situation I do not understand *why* oil feeds fire, I have no *insight* into the matter. What would having that involve? For Spinoza, it would require perceiving oil through its essence, and perceiving fire through its essence, which he thinks would make manifest why oil has the effect on fire that it does. And this is something that dent cognition does not do.

Let's suppose instead that I have acquired my belief that oil feeds fire "from hearsay, or from some sign conventionally agreed upon," say, through some combination of reading textbooks and being told so by teachers. In this case, the situation is more complicated, but Spinoza's basic point remains the same. The relevant associations are more complex in that they now include linguistic dents, an intricate network of associations of sound traces and inscription traces left on my brain.[11] But if I rely on external testimony for the view and do not myself grasp the essence of fire and the essence of oil, then I do not understand why oil feeds fire.

2.2 Understanding

Let's turn from imagination to understanding. How is Spinoza thinking about that? His discussion of fictitious ideas in the TIE is helpful. Spinoza offers an analysis of what happens when someone makes a statement like "men are suddenly changed into beasts." He writes (§62):

> For if by chance we should say that men are changed in a moment into beasts, that is said very generally, so that there is in the mind no concept, i.e., idea or connection of subject and predicate. For if there were any concept, the mind would see together the means and the causes, how and why such a thing was done [*quo et cur tale quid factum*]. And one does not attend to the nature of the subject and the predicate.[12]

Suppose someone, fresh from a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, reports that Bottom was turned into an ass. When Spinoza says that such things are said "very generally," I think what he has in mind is that the speaker has no very concrete idea of how the predicate is related to the subject. It is the absence of such an idea that enables her to form this fiction, which is presumably based on images (say, those associated with Bottom) and perhaps universals generated from such images (e.g., *man* and *ass*).

What sort of thing would give her an idea of the connection? Evidently, what is needed is some sense of "the means and the causes" of the transformation or the "how" and the "why" of this event's taking place. This, in turn, Spinoza implies, requires paying attention to the *nature* of Bottom—both the nature of the pre-transformation human being and the nature of the post-transformation ass. Now, for Spinoza, understanding Bottom's pre- and post-transformation natures involves knowing the pre-transformation plenum structure and the post-transformation plenum structure; and having the "how" and the "why" involves understanding how basic principles of the plenum give rise to such a transformation—i.e., "the means and the causes."

As noted, this is part of Spinoza's account of how we form fictitious ideas. His point is that as we understand these matters better—as we understand what the human Bottom is, what the donkey Bottom is, and what the "how" and the "why" would have to look like—it will eventually become impossible for us to entertain this fiction; the plenum order won't support such transformation.[13] This reinforces something that Spinoza said earlier, in §58:

> the less men know nature, the more easily they can feign many things, such as, that trees speak, that men are changed in a moment into stones and into springs, that nothing becomes something, that even Gods are changed into beasts and into men, and infinitely many other things of that kind.

The better we understand nature, the harder it is for us to make sense of fictions. Before I study chemistry, it might be easy for me to entertain the fiction of water unfrozen at ten degrees below zero, but after I study chemistry such a fiction becomes unintelligible.

So the understanding that is absent in the case of a fictitious idea is a matter of grasping "the means and the causes," or "how and why such a thing was done." That, in turn, is given through the natures (or essences) of the relevant items, which are to be specified via plenum theory.

2.3 Scientia of Individual Items and Events

To the extent that things concerning you can be traced back to your essence (which I am taking here to be your geometrico-kinetic constitution), we have some idea of what it means to have insight into those things and their relation to you.[14] But not everything about you can be traced back to your essence. In particular, your *existence* cannot be traced to *your* essence. Neither can the fact that I was born in 1956 or that my parents are Nick and Kate. So, what might cognition of the third kind of such matters look like?

There is a notion that surfaces at a couple of points in the TIE that I think is helpful here, namely, the order of nature.[15] In §40, Spinoza says that "the better [the mind] understands the order of nature, the more easily it can restrain itself from useless pursuits." This idea of the order of nature comes up again in §65:

> if the existence of a thing conceived is not an external truth, [in order to determine whether our idea of it is true and not a fiction] we need only to take care to compare the existence of the thing with its essence, and at the same time attend to the order of nature.[16]

In order to tell whether my idea of an individual is true or a fiction, I need to see whether that individual's essence fits into the order of nature. Spinoza's appeal to the order of nature in the TIE is similar to an appeal to the "order of universal corporeal nature" in 1p11d2 of the *Ethics*:

> But the reason why a circle or triangle exists, or why it does not exist, does not follow from the nature of these things, but from the order of the whole of corporeal nature. For from this [order] it must follow either that the triangle necessarily exists now [*iam*] or that it is impossible for it to exist now [*iam*].

The article "a" in "a triangle" is not found in the Latin, of course, but it is clear that Spinoza is talking about the existence of some individual triangle, at some particular place and time (as the two *iam*'s indicate). And what he is saying here is that that existence is settled by "the order of the whole of corporeal nature."

That can seem puzzling. We tend to think of nature's order as generic, so that it comprises some set of basic laws. And there is a stratum of Spinoza's metaphysics that corresponds to this level. Such structure is due either to the attributes of Substance itself or to what Spinoza terms the immediate infinite modes (e.g., "motion and rest"). These very general features of the universe are consistent with the existence of our triangle and with the nonexistence of that triangle (although not both at the same time, of course). However, as we have seen, there is another layer of structure, what Spinoza calls the order of nature. That structure is not both consistent with the existence of the triangle and consistent with the nonexistence of the triangle, but rather consistent with only one of the two. I think this stratum corresponds to the mediate infinite mode that Spinoza calls "the face of the whole universe" in Letter 64. In that letter, he links this mode to what he describes in E2lemma7s as "the whole of nature . . . whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole individual." This individual exhibits an order, but a fully determinate one. Whether the triangle exists or not depends on whether it is found in that determinate order.

To return to our question, then, what might it mean for an intellect to have insight into the date of your birth? A full understanding—*scientia*—of your appearing on the scene when you did, requires locating you within the face of the whole universe, and understanding why this individual flows from God's or Substance's essence the way it does. Of course, our finite intellects only partially comprehend this, but God's infinite intellect does so completely.[17]

3. Definition and Essence

Let's consider more closely Spinoza's picture of essence, especially his picture of finite plenum individuals. To a large extent, Spinoza's thinking about essence and definition is indebted to the Aristotelian tradition; but there is striking innovation as well.

A thing's essence is its basic, structural features: it is what makes the thing be the thing that it is. An essence is a worldly item, as opposed to a representational item. A *logos* or *real definition* is an account of an essence. It, in contrast with the essence itself, is a representational item. A *logos* or *real definition* is supposed to track the worldly item, that is, it is supposed to provide a perspicuous representation of a thing's essential structure. In contrast with a real definition, a merely nominal definition tells you how to apply a word. Aristotelians supposed *rational animal* got at a human being's core or constituting powers: it sets the parameters for the theory of what a human being *is*; by way of contrast, *featherless biped* doesn't. Spinoza is implicitly ridiculing the Aristotelian theory when he places my cognition of a man as a rational animal at the lowest level of cognition and groups it with my cognition of a dog as a barking animal (in TIE §20): No one would have thought barking revealed the dog's essence; rather, the ability to bark is a consequence of more fundamental features of the dog. At the end of the *Ethics* (2p40s1), Spinoza makes a similar point, implying that *rational animal* is no better than *laughing animal* or *featherless biped* as an account of a man and accusing philosophers of trying "to explain natural things by mere images of things," i.e., to provide accounts of the deep structure through dent cognition.[18]

The Aristotelian account of definition and essence interacts with the Aristotelian substance-accident ontology in an important way. The dependence of an accident on a substance is included in the accident's essence. In other words, saying what an accident is involves making reference to the substance in which it exists. Aristotle's favorite example is snub: snubness, in virtue of what it is, must exist in a nose. This dependence is reflected in the (real) definition of snub—thus the Aristotelian thesis that substances are "prior in definition" to accidents.[19]

It is worth trying to hear it as "realistically" as possible. So, snubness, we may suppose, is a certain arrangement of the soft tissue and cartilage found in certain animals' noses. And an account of what snubness

is—what we might think of as a theory of snubness—will involve an account of what the thing to which snubness belongs is—that is, a theory of the animal, including a theory of its sensory organs and the arrangement of the soft tissue around those organs.

Notice, then, the relation of snub to nose is not criterial or merely conceptual. Aristotle's point is not that it is part of our "concept" of snub, or perhaps part of the "meaning" of the word *snub*, that snub belongs only to noses. Rather, we should think of snub's being related to noses as world dependent, perhaps a matter of biology, more or less as we think of water's being H_2O as world dependent, a matter of chemistry, and not grounded in the "concept" of water or the "meaning" of the word *water*.

Now, Spinoza accepts both of these ideas, namely, that (i) definitions ought to reveal essences and that (ii) the definition or essence of an accident (for him, a mode) depends on the definition or essence of its substance (for him, God or Nature). The second seems to me less widely appreciated than the first.

Let's consider (i). In §95, Spinoza counsels against confusing a property, that is, something that necessarily flows from a thing's essence, with the essence itself. Spinoza takes a circle as his example. He says we should not define a circle as "a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal." Instead, we should define a circle through its proximate cause, e.g., "as the figure that is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other moveable" (§96). This difference can be hard for a modern reader to hear. Why does Spinoza think that the characterization "a figure that is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other moveable" expresses the essence of a circle, whereas "a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal" does not?

Well, as noted, Spinoza thinks that a good definition includes the circle's proximate cause. In this context, he is thinking of the cause as a Euclidean construction procedure. One idea, which comes up in the period, but which Spinoza does not mention, is that the construction procedure makes evident the possibility of a thing. By showing how to make a circle, the procedure of fixing one end of a line and moving the other end makes clear that a circle is a possible geometrical structure. The characterization "a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal" does not do this. As far as that characterization goes, such a figure might be like a plane figure bounded by exactly two straight lines or like the fastest possible motion.[20]

Beneath this thought is, I think, the following idea: If you know what goes into the construction of something—if you know how something is produced—you have a good picture of its basic structure. Moreover, since there is no more to the circle's structure than what is put into it by its construction procedure, the construction procedure must ground all of its properties (see §96, point 2). So if, for example, having an area

equal to its radius squared times π is a property of the circle structure, this property must be a byproduct of the circle's being the result of rotating a line about a fixed endpoint. By way of contrast, it is not obvious that all of the properties associated with the figure picked out by the characterization "a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal" depend on that feature as opposed to some other aspect of the figure. For this reason, it is natural to think that the definition explains *why* the circle has the property of being "a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal": the figure has this property *because* it was generated by rotating a line about a fixed endpoint.

The reason that the difference between the two formulations can be hard for us to hear today is that we have become accustomed to thinking about geometry in a more formal way, say, as implicitly defined by some set of axioms. Spinoza, in contrast, thinks of geometry as drawing on a substantive subject matter. This brings me to (ii). Implicit in Spinoza's picture, but easy to overlook, is the real work that space (an aspect of extension) is doing in the theory. The constructions implicitly rely on space and its nature. For consider: Why is it that there is a construction procedure for producing a triangle but no procedure for constructing a biangle (a two-sided closed plane figure)? Spinoza's answer is that space (or extension) admits of the one construction but not the other. What a geometrical essence is is a way of describing *space* (or extension). What the definition, the construction procedure, or "proximate cause" does, then, is to make clear that space (or extension) admits of a certain carving or description. The essences presuppose space; they are fundamentally space involving. The theory of the triangle depends on the theory of space. Notice that we have here Spinoza's version of the Aristotelian priority in definition of substance to accident. Geometrical essences are conceived through space in the way that, for Aristotle, the definition of snub involves that of nose.

Now, Spinoza is a bit uneasy about his circle example, because it involves an abstraction from physical, real structure. (Perhaps such an example was only to be expected in view of his concession in §22 that he had thus far been able to grasp the essence of very few real things.) I think his point is this. Consider a fully determinate individual within the plenum, say, Baruch Spinoza's body. This structure is governed not only by geometrical principles that characterize Euclidean space, but also by kinetic and dynamic principles that characterize motion within the plenum. When we think of the roughly spherical shape of, say, Spinoza's skull, we abstract this geometrical structure from the rest of that structure. At this point, talk of the geometrical construction procedure as being the shape's "proximate cause" becomes metaphorical, because the real causes of the body's shape depend on the kinetic and dynamic principles from which we are abstracting.

Even so, the relation of a circle to its construction procedure is closely analogous to the relation of Spinoza's body to the real motions in the plenum that give rise to the particular pattern of motion and rest that is Spinoza's body. For example, in the way that the possibility of the circle depends on what constructions the general structure of space admits of, the possibility of Spinoza's body depends on what physical constructions the general structure of the plenum admits of. Moreover, in the same way the theory of the triangle depends on the theory of space, the theory of Spinoza's body depends on the theory of the plenum. (As Spinoza will put it later in the *Ethics*, Spinoza's body *is conceived through* extension, which includes all of extension's basic structural features.) And, finally, in the same way that the construction procedure for the triangle grounds all of its properties, the proximate cause of Spinoza's body grounds all of its properties.[21]

Notice that, on Spinoza's picture, the geometrical essences are grounded in a real being, space (or extension), which necessarily exists of its own nature. If what a geometrical essence fundamentally is, is the carving of space (or extension)—a "description," in the technical Euclidean sense—then without space there would be no carvings or descriptions, and so no procedures. This point is related to a remark that Spinoza makes in 1p8s2 that while we can form a true idea of a nonexistent modification, we cannot form a true idea of a nonexistent substance. In the current context, for example, the essence of a modification, say, a nonexistent cube, is included in, or conceived through, Substance, one of whose essential attributes is extension.

For Spinoza, the dependence of a finite essence on the ur-essence is such that the finite thing must *be understood through* the ur-structure: You can't understand a triangle unless you understand the basic Euclidean structure of which the triangle is a determination. More to the point, you can't understand Spinoza's body—how it is put together and what it is doing—unless you understand the basic geometric, kinetic, and dynamic principles that order the plenum, of which Spinoza's body is a determination.

We still think of our own bodies along these lines. My body is not some inert, lumpish item, but rather a dynamic system constantly internally moving. As such it depends on the basic causal order of the universe; it could not survive, for example, the suspension of the laws of electricity and magnetism.

None of this is so, of course, for Aristotelians, who regard a finite being like Socrates as a substance in its own right. As a substance, Socrates is not defined through—because his essence does not involve—something else.[22]

Aristotelian essences are, then, very different from the essences envisioned by Spinoza. There is nothing in the Aristotelian scheme corresponding to the geometric, kinetic, and dynamic structure that Spinoza thinks plenum essences involve. The materials that the Aristotelians build

their essences out of—perfections like *living*, *animal*, *rational*—are in Spinoza's view blockish items (in his book, roughly, blurred images: 2p40s1) and, as such, unpromising candidates for the ingredients in a theory of an individual's basic structure. They look at most to be *propria*.[23]

3.1 Generality, Repeatability, Universals, and Concepts

In §98, Spinoza says that the "best basis for drawing a conclusion" is a "particular [*particulari*] affirmative essence." Spinoza's emphasis on the particular affirmative essence is telling. It is a sign that generality does not figure in his conception of understanding in the way that it did for many Aristotelians, who often took understanding to be deeply connected with an ability to grasp universals; or, for that matter, that generality does not figure in Spinoza's thought in the way it does for many philosophers today, who see a special relation between understanding (or intellectual) thought and conceptual thought.

Stepping back for a moment, I think it is important to notice that, in Spinoza's universe, the basic causal arcs (within the various attributes) run from one individual, namely, the unique substance, God, to another infinitely complex individual. In the case of extension, for example, the arc runs from God, insofar as he is extended, through the immediate infinite modes (for example, motion and rest) to what Spinoza calls the face of the whole universe; in the case of thought, it runs from God, insofar as he thinks, to the idea of God. The basic intellectual movement that tracks this arc is not one from general propositions to particular propositions.

Spinoza's picture is more mathematical than discursive. The intellectual path from God's essence to the produced order is more like solving a geometrical construction problem: in the case of extension, the issue is how God's unlimited power expresses itself determinately within the plenum.[24] We might think of this as, in large part, a matter of there being a sort of quasi-mathematical *upper bound* on the amount of reality that extension is capable of receiving through motion and rest.[25]

After writing in §98 that the "best basis for drawing a conclusion" is a "particular affirmative essence," Spinoza continues in §99:

> From this we can see that above all it is necessary for us always to deduce all our ideas from physical things, or from real beings, proceeding, as far as possible, according to the series of causes, from one real being to another real being, in such a way that we do not pass over to abstractions and universals, neither inferring something real from them, nor inferring them from something real.

What is behind Spinoza's emphasis on a "particular affirmative essence" and "real beings" and his related comment that we need to avoid becoming involved with "abstractions and universals"?

For Spinoza, if I want to understand some plenum structure—say, Spinoza's body, or that rainbow over there, or the solar system—I should attempt to characterize the geometrical-kinetic-dynamic structure of *that* individual without worrying about other individuals in the plenum that are like it (or unlike it) in various respects. Given Spinoza's geometrical orientation, this is a natural (though perhaps not unproblematic) line of thought. Let me explain.

When I am working out a geometrical argument—say, constructing a diagram that exhibits the relationship between the three interior angles of a triangle and a straight line—I am focused on *individuals*: *these* angles in *that* triangle bearing some relation to *that* line. I see the necessity of the relationship in *this* case, and I can, if I so choose, generalize to other relevantly similar cases. Here it seems that generality comes from the necessity rather than the necessity from generality. That's true of geometry, but it is also true of geometric-kinetic-dynamic accounts of real motion-and-rest structures in the plenum. Suppose I am trying to figure out the deep structure of the rainbow over there in the sky. When I do so, I am focused on the question of why the drops of water in that mist have a certain effect on the light; in other words, I attempt to work out the relevant relationships for *that* arrangement of drops. If I succeed, my theory works irrespective of whether there happen to be other similar configurations of drops in the plenum.[26]

Now, to be sure, my theory is, let's say, *repeatable*, in the following sense: if there are similar configurations of drops in the plenum that happen to be similarly situated with respect to light, and so on, they too will bend light so as to form rainbows. But this repeatability is in a certain sense an afterthought: it is not of the essence of the explanation, of the understanding acquired through working out the mechanics of this rainbow. The repeatability comes from seeing why it holds in this case, and noting that *if* other cases are similar, *then* the same things will be true of them.[27]

Spinoza concludes §101 with a helpful and intriguing remark:

> So although these fixed and eternal things are singular [*singularia*], nevertheless, because of their presence everywhere, and most extensive power, they will be to us like universals, or genera, of the definitions of singular, changeable things, and the proximate causes of all things.

I have just tried to explain how repeatability is not at the heart of the Spinozistic explanatory enterprise: my account of the workings of this rainbow is focused on *it*, rather than what it may or may not have in common with all other rainbows. What about the basic principles of the geometric, kinetic, and dynamic orders themselves? Here it might be felt that there is something that is fundamentally general or universal at work. I take it that Spinoza is agreeing here with that suggestion, but

only in a qualified way. They "will be," he says, "to us *like* universals, or genera, of the definitions of singular, changeable things." Why only "like," though?

Here we should keep an eye on the way in which the fixed and eternal things function within Spinoza's theory. The universe's basic geometric, kinetic, and dynamic structure is "omnipresent" in a special way: this structure is *invariant* throughout the plenum. Take, for example, something as simple as the triangle law. Any three points in the plenum, no matter where they are located, and no matter how far they are from one another, obey the following principle: the path going from the first to the second and then from the second to the third is longer than the path going from the first to the third (unless the three points are collinear, in which case the paths are equal). This same sort of invariance is also found in the kinetic and dynamic structure. This invariance is different from the sort of generality involved in, say, "All humans are mortal" or "All triangles have three sides." We might put it that the generality here is one of *uniformity* rather than one of shared features or predicates. And so while "fixed and universal things" occupy a place in Spinoza's scheme analogous to that of universals in an Aristotelian scheme, they are only "like" universals.[28]

I note further that, for Spinoza, something akin to location within the all-encompassing extended substance must be playing a role in what makes *this* rainbow the individual that it is. After all, there might be found another, structurally identical rainbow somewhere else in the universe. This would be analogous to what makes two spheres (with the same radius) different spheres in Euclidean space: the one is a description carved in *this* region of the all-encompassing space, and the other is a description carved in *that* region of the all-encompassing space; simply put, the individuals are posterior to an ur-singular thing (be it extension or space) that allows things to be individuated in this way.

Spinoza does not show much interest in such matters; he seems to think they will take care of themselves. Perhaps he thinks there is not much of theoretical interest here, beyond the observation that spatio-temporal location matters to the identity of finite modes of extension. It is worth noticing that this way of thinking about individuation is reflected in God's cognition of the universe. God's cognition is intuitive, not discursive. God does not, say, bring the manifold under general concepts. Rather, with respect to extension, God simply intuits the production of the face of the whole universe, in all of its wonderful complexity, and, I take it, understands the two rainbows via his grasp of the face of the whole extended order.

This colors Spinoza's attitude toward the classical problem of universals. On one understanding of the problem, the issue concerns whether the kind *human* is grounded in similarities found among certain individuals (we may call this position "nominalism") or whether the similarities

among certain individuals are grounded in the kind ("realism" or "moderate realism"). So, for example: Is corporeality a sort of ingredient in my nature and in your nature, which is why you and I are similar in certain ways, such as that I, like you, have shape and size and occupy space? Or is corporeality merely a way of cognitively or linguistically marking that we are similar in certain ways: that we both have size and shape and take up space?

Neither option fits Spinoza's metaphysics. Consider two extended things, say, Spinoza's body and the solar system. What they are, for Spinoza, are two different "motion-and-rest" determinations of extension. As determinations of extension they inherit the order of the "omnipresent" "fixed and eternal things." (Each of them obeys the triangle law, for example.) So their similarities are not primitive; they have a deep explanation. But—and this seems crucial—this explanation does not come through kind membership, from the fact that they are both instances of the kind *extended*. Rather, it comes from their relation to a certain base object, namely God insofar as he is extended. As determinations of this individual, Spinoza's body and the solar system have a great deal in common for much the same reason that two descriptions of one and the same Euclidean space have much in common: through "existing in" extension the bodies inherit its structural invariances, as two geometrical figures inherit the invariances of Euclidean space. This is why, I believe, Spinoza thinks of the "fixed and eternal things" as "singular" in §101: they are pervasive features of a single extended structure.

The contrast that Spinoza draws between his picture of generality as grounded in pervasive features of the plenum and the more familiar Aristotelian one as grounded in universals is subtle and interesting. We might wonder how his conception compares with a modern, post-Kantian and post-Fregean picture of generality in terms of concepts.[29] Here it matters perhaps how we are thinking of the concept of extension. On the one hand, if we are thinking of the concept *extension* as more or less exhausted by criteria for sorting things into the extended and the nonextended (so that, for example, the solar system goes into the "extended" bin, and my thought of the solar system does not), then it seems much thinner than what Spinoza has in view. On the other hand, if we are thinking of the concept in a richer manner, as, say, implicitly defined perhaps by some set of topological axioms, then it seems to come closer to the sort of thing Spinoza is concerned with. I don't believe the latter way of thinking about geometry is available to Spinoza. The point I have in mind is closely related to Kant's later claim that geometry is not analytic but synthetic: that we cannot get at the geometrical relationships by analyzing the concept of extension.[30] This is part of what makes it natural for Spinoza to view extension (or space) as a singular thing, instead of an instance of something more

general, and to see its finite extended individuals as drawing on the structure of that singular thing.

3.2 The Essence of a Finite Extended Individual and the Causal Grid

It is sometimes felt that a plenum individual cannot be understood apart from the entire causal grid in which it is embedded. It is common to read 1a4 of the *Ethics* along these lines. In terms of the TIE, Spinoza emphasizes the importance of the interchange [*commercii*] that things have with one another (§41) or the connection [*concatenationem*] of things (§95) for understanding Nature properly. That encourages the following picture. You are the offspring of your parents, and they are the offspring of their parents, all the way back to Lucy, and things go back from there all the way back to the big bang. A full understanding of you, it seems, should bring into account the myriad and manifold relations and events that brought you on the scene—your parents, your species, your ecosystem, and so forth. If this is so, it is plausible to think Spinoza might hold that your essence should inherit some or all of these relationships and events. And indeed there is a passage in §99, concerning definition and essence, that indicates that a "series of causes" is involved in the essence of finite things. Doesn't this suggest that the causal grid is implicated in the essence of a (plenum) mode?

While the exact interpretation of this passage may be obscure, Spinoza goes on in the next section (§100) to make clear that this is *not* his meaning: "But note that by the series of causes and of real beings I do not here understand the series of singular, changeable things, but only the series of fixed and eternal things." Spinoza explains further:

> For it would be impossible for human weakness to grasp the series of singular, changeable things, not only because there are innumerably many of them, but also because of the infinite circumstances in one and the same thing, any of which can be the cause of its existence or nonexistence.

Although no human could grasp all these circumstances, this does not matter for the project of grasping a particular essence. This is because, Spinoza tells us, "their existence has no connection with their essence."

Spinoza explains further in the next section (§101):

> But there is also no need for us to understand their series. The essences of singular, changeable things are not to be drawn from their series, or order of existing, since it offers us nothing but extrinsic denominations, relations, or at most, circumstances, all of which are far from the inmost essence of things.

Here Spinoza distinguishes sharply the series of mutable things that furnish the "extrinsic characteristics," "relations," and "circumstances" of a thing from the thing's "inmost essence."

But if we don't think of "the series of causes and of real beings" mentioned in §100 as the spatially and temporally extended causal nexus, as the causal grid, how are we supposed to think of it? Spinoza goes on to explain (in §101):

> That essence is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the laws inscribed in these things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered. Indeed these singular, changeable things depend so intimately, and (so to speak) essentially, on the fixed things that they can neither be nor be conceived without them. So although these fixed and eternal things are singular, nevertheless, because of their presence everywhere, and most extensive power, they will be to us like universals, or genera, of the definitions of singular, changeable things, and the proximate causes of all things.

But how do the fixed and eternal things form a "series"? Here's a suggestion. Perhaps the series runs along these lines: First, there is the basic geometrical (Euclidean) order found at the level of extension. A second layer of kinetic structure is introduced through the immediate modes, which includes motion and rest.[31] Beyond these layers of global structure, there must also be, of course, local structure peculiar to the individual—the structures involved in maintaining the particular *ratio* of motion and rest that the individual is.[32] (A natural development of Spinoza's idea here—though one not yet available in the 17th century—is that an understanding of the body depends, say, on physiological order, which in turn depends on biological order, which in turn depends on biochemical order, and so forth, until we get to quantum mechanics.) We should notice also that the causal series we have in view is more synchronic, or perhaps achronic, than diachronic.

If this is correct, the local structure is conceived through the immediate modal structure (motion and rest) and, ultimately, through extension, an attribute of substance. This would be part of Spinoza's reworking of the idea that the essence or theory of the mode involves the essence or theory of its substance.[33] We cannot understand a *ratio* of motion and rest without understanding the principles of motion and the principles of extension.

Spinoza, of course, has systematic reasons for wanting to recover a notion of my essence that is to a certain extent detachable from the causal grid. In Parts 3 through 5 of the *Ethics* he offers a theory of those things that tend to enhance our conatuses and those things that tend to diminish our conatuses, which conatuses he identifies with our essences. This theory requires that I have a nature that is to a certain extent to be

worked out separately from the rest of the causal grid. (I have in mind, in particular, Spinoza's theory of being active and being passive.) That said, it is important not to overstate my independence. At the end of the day, according to Spinoza, I am a profoundly dependent being, and that dependence, as we have seen, is registered in the fact that my essence must be conceived through Nature's geometric, kinetic, and dynamic order. Indeed, Spinoza thinks we have a tendency to overlook our dependence and exaggerate our (relative) independence, so that at times we come to see ourselves as somehow in opposition to Nature's order—as if we could be in an antagonistic relationship with the very geometric, kinetic, and dynamic fabric from which we are cut. I see Spinoza's account of essence as meant to strike a balance: It preserves my reality as an individual thing while simultaneously making clear my status as an utterly dependent thing.

4. Conclusion

My attempt to flesh out Spinoza's picture of understanding and *scientia*, and his related picture of definition and essence, draws heavily from his plenum physics. Some may find this surprising, preferring instead to allow Spinoza's account of understanding to rest on his commitment to some generic principle of sufficient reason. After all, it might be argued, God has other attributes besides extension. However, because Spinoza holds that the human body is the "object" of the idea that counts as the human mind, cognition of the extended order holds a certain primacy in human thought. So, we must turn to extension to give determinate content to something like the principle of sufficient reason. Unless we do so, for him, talk of a principle of sufficient reason courts the risk of emptiness. Similarly, it is hard to have much of a sense of what he might have in mind when he suggests that modes can be "deduced" or modes "follow from" from Substance and its attributes, unless we drawn on his views about the plenum.

As we have tried to make things more concrete, several important themes have emerged. For Spinoza, the universe is intelligible in a thoroughgoing way, but that intelligibility has a decidedly mathematical flavor. Appreciating this is important for understanding Spinoza's attitude toward the way generality figures in the scheme of things. Produced things, as determinations of the plenum, inherit the plenum's invariances. Thus, there is a place for a sort of generality in his picture, but one that differs in important, if somewhat subtle, ways from what one finds in either realist or nominalist theories of Aristotelian universals, as well as from the sort of generality one sees associated with concepts taken as rules for organizing experience.

We have also seen how Spinoza's picture of the essence of plenum beings is informed by his thinking about geometry and space. The essence

of a finite individual in the plenum is a genetic construction akin to a geometrical construction: giving the real definition of a body amounts to explaining how that body can arise in—how it might be a *determination* of—extension's basic (invariant) geometric, kinetic, and dynamic structure, just as giving the real definition of a circle amounts to explaining how such a shape can arise in—it might be a *description* of—space's basic Euclidean structure.

Finally, we see how the essences of such beings depend on the existence of a necessary ur-being. As possible determinations of extension (again, in the way that geometrical figures are possible descriptions of Euclidean space), these essences depend on extension and its basic structure. The idea that finite essences depend on God is not new. It was common enough in medieval and early modern philosophical theology to view finite essences as limitations of the unlimited *ens realissimum*, and to think that, further, a full understanding of finite essence involves seeing its relation to the ur-essence.[34] Spinoza's view that the plenum beings are fundamentally geometric-kinetic-dynamic determinations of an unconditionally necessary, extended being develops this traditional idea in an especially vivid way.[35]

Notes

1 Lilli Alanen's "Spinoza on Human Mind" (2011), especially §8, was the immediate stimulus for this paper. In particular, her insightful treatment there of the first kind of cognition, as a sort of garden variety of knowledge, raised a question about how to think about the other two kinds. It is a pleasure to contribute it to this volume. I am grateful to Lilli both for her probing work and for our many discussions over the years, from which I have profited immensely, as well as for her support, encouragement, and friendship.

2 See TIE, § 19, KV II, Ch. 1, and E2p40s2.

3 Although this is not my topic here, it is worth keeping in mind that *scientia* was often held to be bound up with the highest form of human happiness. Many thought that having one's cognition line up with the universe's ultimate causal order (which includes the order of the universe's original cause or God) affords the highest happiness available to a human being. There are clear vestiges of this idea in Spinoza's writings. See TIE §§13&99 and *Ethics*, 2p49s, 4app4, and 5p31. For further discussion see Carriero 2018, 240–50; 2014, 20–25.

4 All translations are taken from Curley (ed. and trans.) 1985/2016.

5 In particular, necessitarianism seems a more natural outlook in a world where getting from God to the determinate causal order is thought of as akin to a geometrical construction problem, rather than deriving particular truths from general premises. See section 1 of this chapter.

6 For two helpful recent discussions of *scientia intuitiva* within the context of Spinoza's *Ethics*, see Garrett 2010, reprinted in Garrett 2018; Primus 2017.

7 Spinoza does refer to such cognition as "opinion" in the *Short Treatise* (see, e.g., Part 2, chs. 1–3), which seems to cover roughly the same ground as *doxa* does for Plato. For helpful commentary, see Wolf 1963, 204–5.

8 I think "cause" here means "provides the ground of" as opposed to "is the efficient cause of." (If it means the latter, then Spinoza evidently changed his mind by the time he wrote the *Ethics*.)

9 To expand, even though the first level of cognition does not involve seeing the "how" or the "why," it can be quite secure. Spinoza, for example, is quite happy to use *scio*—I know—in connection with it. I know who my parents are and I know when I was born. Indeed, Spinoza writes, "it is in this way [i.e., via the first sort of cognition] that I know [*novi*] almost everything that is of practical use in life." Although it is secure in this way, it is the only level where error can be found. This is because Spinoza views understanding as incompatible with the possibility of error. Spinoza's idea is that certainty is coextensive with understanding: on the one hand, if I don't understand why it is that I will die someday—it is just that I have noticed that people do, without my catching on to the rhyme or reason of the thing—then it is possible for me to be wrong about this, no matter how, as we might put it, well-grounded my conviction is. But if I understand why it is that I will die—say, if I see how mortality is built into the nature of an animal—then error is impossible. It is easy to think that Spinoza's point about certainty following understanding is that "understanding," like knowledge, is a success term, so that if I really understand why *s* is *p* then it follows that *s* is *p*. I take it, however, that Spinoza's point concerns the nature of understanding: there's something that goes on when I see that three is related to six in the same way that two is related to four that doesn't go on when I take this on authority, and what goes on in the former case doesn't admit of error. Spinoza thinks certain subject matters—including mathematics, metaphysics, and theology—are such that when one is thinking clearly only trivial mistakes, akin to slips of the tongue, are possible (E2p47s). This has to do with the nature of our cognitive relationship to those subject matters.

10 As a matter of fact, we probably pick these views up through a combination of hearsay—which includes what our teachers tell us about such matters—and casual experience, but let's leave that aside.

11 Or so I suppose. Spinoza does not say a lot about how language works. He does seem to think that language plays a role in cognition involving traditional universals—notions like dog, horse, and man. The dents that dogs leave on me coalesce into a blurry image, somewhat like an overexposed photograph, I think, and words are useful both for picking out a given blurry image and for (partially) coordinating my blurry images with yours.

12 It is interesting to see Spinoza couch his discussion in terms of the connection of a subject with a predicate, which is unusual for him. I believe that the thought that the connection between a subject and a predicate ought to be intelligible, not brute, is common in the Aristotelian tradition. See Carriero 2017, 159–60.

13 One might wonder if it makes a difference whether we think of the fictional statement as "Men can suddenly turn into asses" or as "Bottom suddenly turned into that ass." I don't think so. See the discussion of "repeatability" in section 3.1 of this chapter.

14 I am focusing on the human body discussion. I don't think much would change if we took into account how and why the human mind appears on the scene. For a brief account of this, see Carriero 2016, 139–41.

15 The order of Nature comes up in §§40, 55, and 65.

16 I am not quite sure what Spinoza means when he suggests that "compar[ing] the existence of the thing with its essence" suffices to determine whether our idea of the thing is true or a fiction. Perhaps his thought is that when I am trying to figure out whether something exists I need to be working with its deep structure rather than its surface features.

17 I suggest below that understanding how and why this face of the universe flows from God's unlimited power is akin to solving a construction problem in geometry.

18 For further discussion, see Carriero 2015, 162–71.
19 See *Metaphysics*, *Z*, chs. 4 and 5.
20 The first example is taken from Kant (see, e.g., *Critique of Pure Reason*, A220–221/B268, Kant 1998) and the second—perhaps unfortunate, in view of relativity theory—from Leibniz (see, e.g., "Meditations on Cognition, Truth, and Ideas," Leibniz 1989, 25).
21 I note that it is not clear to me whether we are to think of those causes diachronically—so that they involve, e.g., embryology—or synchronically—so that they involve the processes responsible for the internal motions that preserve his *ratio* of motion and rest, say, things like his circulatory and respiratory system. Perhaps Spinoza sees a place for both.
22 This point needs to be balanced against the view, mentioned at the end of the paper, that finite essences were commonly thought to be limitations of God's unlimited essence, making room for some sort of further understanding.
23 For further discussion see the essay referred in n. 18 of this chapter.
24 Leibniz compares God's choice of this world to the construction problem in geometry in §6 of the "Discourse on Metaphysics," Leibniz 1989, 39. Of course, for Leibniz choice is involved, whereas for Spinoza the "solution" is an automatic result or expression of God's unlimited power.
25 Here I disagree with one of the primary motivations for the position that Edwin Curley develops in Chapter 2 of *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (1969) and that Curley and Walski 1999 further develop. For additional discussion see Garrett 1991, reprinted as Chapter 4 of Garrett 2018, and Postscript to Chapter 4 of that work. See also Carriero 1991.
26 Indeed, if there are other rainbows in the plenum, it is in principle possible that their deep structures are different: that is, it is in principle possible that their drops are structured or arranged differently, so that there is some other mechanism at work which produces the same effect as the rainbow whose structure I am attempting to characterize.
27 This emphasis can also be found in Berkeley's account of generality (see Introduction to PHK, §16, in Berkeley 1982, 16). No one in the period seems drawn to a classical picture of abstraction according to which essences are extracted from experience.
28 Our cognition of the omnipresent structure rests on what Spinoza calls common notions in the *Ethics*, which Spinoza indicates at the beginning of 2p40s are "universal." That is, it is our cognition of what is "equal in the part and in the whole." When he introduces common structure at 2p37, he refers the reader to 2pLemma2, "All bodies agree in certain things." I think it is better to think of a common notion in terms of one's appreciation of the basic structure of extension that one has in virtue of one's body being the object of the idea that counts as one's mind, for Spinoza, rather than some further representation that one forms. This appreciation, I take it, is related to what goes on when the mind "regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions" (2p29s). But this is a difficult issue. I am grateful to Don Garrett for raising it.
29 I am grateful to discussion with Peter Myrdal and Arto Repo on this topic.
30 We won't, he thinks, be able to explain by such means why it is not possible to find more than three mutually perpendicular lines through a common point, for example.
31 Spinoza instances in Letter 64 "motion and rest" in the case of extension as an example of an immediate infinite mode.
32 Spinoza provides a sketch of a complex individual in the material on physics in Part 2 of the *Ethics*. I think Letter 32, about the worm in the blood, suggests a similar picture. There seem to be different levels of structures, where

sometimes a macro level is set up so that it "regulates" a micro level, so that, for example, the blood's nature regulates the proportion and arrangement of the lymph and chyle particles.

33 This is signaled in the passage by the remark, "Indeed, these mutable particular things depend so intimately and essentially (so to phrase it) on the fixed things that they can neither be nor be conceived without them."

34 See, for example, Bréhier 1968; Adams 2007.

35 Versions of this chapter were delivered as papers at the Judgement Conference, Philosophy Department, University of Turku, in September 2012, and the 8th Margaret Dauler Wilson Conference, at the State University of New York at Buffalo, June 2018. I am grateful to those audiences for their questions and comments. I'd like to thank Lilli for several discussions of this chapter, and Aaron West for extensive conversation about definition and essence in the TIE, which has helped to shape my outlook on that material. Don Garrett and Martina Reuter each provided very helpful comments on a late draft. I am also grateful to Joseph Almog, Antti Hiltunen, Karolina Hübner, Olli Koistinen, Gavin Lawrence, Peter Myrdal, Calvin Normore, and Arto Repo for helpful discussion of topics related to this chapter.

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7 Mind-Body Interaction and Unity in Spinoza

Olli Koistinen

It is commonly held that there is interaction between minds and bodies. In perception, the perceiver forms mental representations and beliefs due to physical items causing changes in her perceptual organs; and in action desires and beliefs make the agent's body to move. Somehow, mind and body are united.

In early modern philosophy, the problem of interaction was based on a perhaps false reading of Descartes's dualism. The basic story is known by everyone. The world consists of minds and bodies which are substances; i.e. things whose being depends only on the existence of God. A human being is mind-body union in which mind and body interact. However, the interaction becomes a problem because it is somehow natural to hold that in causation causes give to effects what the causes in some way contain. A moving body may cause another body to move because there already is movement in the body. But how in this picture could a purely physical thing interact with a mental substance? There seems to be a complete heterogeneity between mental and physical substances. It is hard to know what Descartes himself really thought of the possibility of interaction between mind and body and of the union itself—it may well be that explaining their interaction and union was not on his agenda. Philosophically, he was mainly concerned to show that there is a distinction between mind and body and left it for experience to teach us about their unity.

This chapter is motivated by the question whether Spinoza, who explicitly criticizes Descartes on mind and body, offers a viable alternative to what he took Descartes's position to be. In the first section, I present Spinoza's basic conception of causation which seems to lead to a rather odd position, parallelism, about the relationship between mind and body. In the second section, the aim is to show that Spinoza's philosophy of mind and especially his conception of the mind and ideas should be rethought. It will be argued that in Spinoza there is room for an infinity of genuine thinking subjects, which are not reducible to bundles of ideas. The reading proposed here may seem vulnerable to Karolina Hübner's

criticism of dependency readings of Spinoza. In the third section, it will be argued that this perceptive criticism does not, in the end, pose a problem for my interpretation. In the fourth section, Spinoza's view that ideas can be caused only by other ideas will be given an alternative reading to those where ideas are seen as full-fledged modes causing other ideas on the model of causation in the extended world (see, for example, Bennett 1983, chapter 6.)

1. The Problem of Interaction

For Spinoza the world is immersed in causation. Every change is part of an infinite causal series—physical changes in a series composed solely of physical things and mental items in a series consisting solely of mental items. However, Spinoza denies interaction between mental items and bodily items which seems to push him towards Malebranche's occasionalism or Leibniz's pre-established harmony.

The unintelligibility of interaction between mind and bodies is something that stems from Descartes's dualism. For Spinoza causation requires force. Bodies have forces to move other bodies or to stop them from moving; and human minds also have force with the help of which minds move from one thought to another. However, these forces, physical force and mental force, are alien to each other. When criticizing Descartes's theory of mind-body interaction in the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes:

> And surely, since will and motion have no common standard, there cannot be any comparison between the power or strength of the mind and body, and consequently the strength of the latter cannot possibly be determined by the strength of the former.
>
> (E5pref.)[1]

In Descartes's worldview, where mind and body are firmly separated from each other, the power of the mind and the power of the body are incommensurable which makes it unintelligible how the power of the body could change the mind and vice versa. The interaction of course becomes problematic even in Descartes's own basic commitments. In Meditation Three (AT 7, 40–41; CSM 2, 28–29), Descartes tells that that there cannot be anything in the effect that was not previously in the cause. But how can there be motion in the mind that somehow could affect the extended world?

From Descartes's considerations Spinoza sees a two-world theory evolving. Mind and bodies are as it were in their own worlds with no possibility of interaction and unity. What Descartes says about the possibility of unity and interaction is worthless by Spinoza's standards. His denial of interaction is explicitly formulated by 3p2:

> The body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the body to motion or rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else).

Did Spinoza bury in his substance monism a kind of Cartesian view of the mind and body and did he just draw from this the conclusion that there cannot be any interaction? Minds and bodies are somehow in different worlds. Spinoza provides reasons for the denial of mind-body interaction very early in the first part of the *Ethics*. Causation between x and y requires that they are similar in the sense that the knowledge of an effect depends on the knowledge of its cause. For Spinoza causation requires that it should be understandable how the effect comes from the cause. However, experience seems to tell that mind and body are deeply connected, and this is something Spinoza was well aware of. So, there is what might be called the *appearance* of interaction.

It is easy to succumb to the temptation that Spinoza, even though a substance monist, was a mind-body—or an idea-body—dualist. There are bodies and there are ideas and bodies and ideas live in their own causal networks without interaction. And once we add to this 2p7 claiming that "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" a very Leibnizian picture evolves. There is a parallelism between the mental and the physical realms, and this parallelism should explain the appearance of interaction. If this is the case, then Spinoza's conception of the mind-body relation seems to drive him towards the conceptions of Leibniz and Malebranche, who try to explain away interaction between mind and body.

But, and as we all know, Spinoza somehow saw mind and body as identical. "[A] mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways" writes Spinoza in 2p7s. So mental events are identical with physical events. But why does he deny interaction between ideas and bodies if they are identical? There certainly is both idea-idea-causation and body-body-causation. It has been suggested that Spinoza only means that there is a dualism of causal explanations without ontological dualism (see, for example, Della Rocca 1991). Mental events can be explained only when the order of nature is conceived solely under the attribute of thought. In turn, physical events can be explained only when the order of nature is conceived under the attribute of extension. However, it is one and the same order. There is some textual evidence for this interpretation, but it faces a problem because it seems that without dualism the solution cannot work. The simple point is this: if one and the same thing can be truly characterized both with mental predicates and physical predicates, there has to be something in the thing that allows these characterizations to be truly applied to them. Analogously, if a thing can be truly characterized both

as a president and as a marathon runner, the person has to be both president and a marathon runner.

Descartes was not able to make the unity of the human being intelligible—at least he was not able to provide the reader with a clear and distinct idea of it. What he was concerned to show was that in spite of the unity that we experience human being consists of mind and body which are really distinct. It goes beyond our finite understanding how these two separate things form one—but it is a fact of experience that they do (AT 3, 692; CSMK, 227).

Unlike Descartes, Spinoza thought he was able to explain the mind-body union; and as should be evident this is enough for attributing to him the denial of parallelism which, fundamentally, is a doctrine that tries to explain away the ontological union. This is what Spinoza writes in 2p13s:

> From the above we understand not only that the human Mind is united to the Body but also what is to be understood by the union of Mind and Body.

This passage hardly comes from a philosopher who wants to explain away the unity. Spinoza goes further than Descartes. He is not only convinced that mind and body are united but he also believes that this union can be made understandable. So let us see whether Spinoza has an alternative explication of the mind-body union that surpasses and is different from Descartes's quietism.

2. Mind in Acts of Thought and Ideas

To understand Spinoza's philosophy of mind the basic concepts used need to be understood. The main players are:

i. Thought
ii. Singular thoughts (*singulares cogitationes*)
iii. Idea
iv. Mind

Thought for Spinoza is an infinite attribute of God. It is an expression of God's infinity essence. The infinity of thought means that God thinks of everything that happens in his other infinite attributes. Besides extension, we may leave the other attributes aside here since our concern is with the relation between mind and body, and for that reason it is sufficient to say that God's infinity in thought means that he thinks of everything that happens in the world of extension. In terms of 2p1d, God forms singular thoughts of everything there is in the physical universe. God thinks of my body as well as the bodies of all the ants there are in the world. Moreover,

God also thinks of the infinite universe. These singular thoughts are distinct from the things thought about; and are close to Descartes's ideas as operations of the intellect (AT 7, 8; CSM 2, 7).

The second axiom of E2 says that "Man thinks." This axiom sounds innocent but creates a difficulty in Spinoza's monism. How is there room for several thinkers when God is the only thinking substance? What does it mean that "I think" when God is the only source of ideas?[2]

Spinoza makes a distinction between God-qua-finite and God-qua-infinite. This distinction should not, I believe, be thought in terms of the distinction between God-substance and his modes. Rather, Spinoza's point is that God's essence, i.e., his infinite power, involves an infinity of finite essences. So when I think, it is a part of God's essence that does the thinking and that part of God's essence or power is my essence. In a similar way, all essences of singular things are parts of God's essence or power. I believe this can be explained as follows: numbers are commonly presented as points in an infinite line (the so-called real line). Think of God's essence or power as represented by an infinite line starting from zero. Essences of individuals could now be represented as segments of that line zero being their common point of origin. The infinite line in itself could be seen to represent God's essence qua infinite. The line is not composed of these finite segments but is prior to them giving the possibility of divisions in it. This gives, perhaps, a glimpse of how God's power differs from the power of any finite thing. Any actual finite thing in respect of its power of thought is at an infinite distance from the power of God qua infinite. This kind of picture of God's essence allows there to be an infinity of finite thinkers, or gods-qua-finite, involved in God's essence. Of these thinkers, each is capable of forming singular thoughts. Such individual thoughts in being due to gods-qua-finite express God's nature in a definite and determinate way:

> Individual thoughts, or this and that thought, are modes expressing the nature of God in a definite and determinate way (Cor. Pr. 25, I). (*Singulares cogitationes sive haec et illa cogitatio modi sunt, qui Dei naturam certo et determinato modo exprimunt (per coroll. prop. 25. P. 1.)*).
>
> (2p1d)

The thoughts I have or make are thoughts that express the nature of God in a determinate way. Thus, the instances of "I think" are thoughts God forms-qua-finite. My essence, for Spinoza, is a part of God's essence or force and so individual thoughts, in expressing God's nature in a certain and determinate way, express my essence or nature. The manifestation of God's power as thought is conceivable in itself: it is the power to form ideas, i.e. to think of things of other attributes than those of thought.

What Spinoza tries to say is that individual thoughts are due to *natura naturans*, not to it conceived absolutely or in totality, but to a certain part of it. This may seem odd but it is not. The nature of the thinking self has always been an important subject of discussion in philosophy. When Descartes attempts to pinpoint what kind of substance he is, he just tells us that he is a thinking substance, and that is all. However, in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* Spinoza saw that the characterization of something as a thinking substance gives just a "relational" description of the thing doing the thinking (Spinoza 2002, 28). It does not give any characterization of the thing due to whose power the thoughts are generated. Somehow the pure nature of the thinking thing seems not to be available to us.

Much of Spinoza's metaphysics can be seen to evolve from this problem of the apparent unknowability of the thinking thing. According to Spinoza, we have adequate cognition of God's essence, that is, of his infinite power. The power of a finite thinking thing is involved in this infinite power and is in this sense part of that infinite power. Let us look at this from an egocentric viewpoint: Of myself as a subject of thinking there is nothing more to know than this finite power which is revealed in what Spinoza calls adequate thinking. For Spinoza the question about the nature of the thinking thing apart from its thinking does not arise: adequate thinking reveals the nature of the thinking thing (E 3d2). And we should add that the cognition of this power as thinking power is conceivable through itself. For example, when I am proving the Pythagorean theorem, I am both aware of the spatial/extended constituents of the proof, and of my thinking power. It is my knowledge of this latter, even though initiated through my attention being focused on something extended, that I conceive without anything spatial or extended, i.e., my consciousness of this power or force does not require conception of anything extended or spatial.

For Spinoza, the subject of thinking is not an individual thing having properties but a force. In adequate active thinking this force is creative whereas in inadequate thinking it just registers what is going on. Spinoza calls its actions ideas. The ideas do not have a reality of their own—they are not like intentional objects when intentional objects are seen as having their own kind of "mental existence." Rather the picture is this: the thinking subject in having an idea in perception directs her thought to some thing in extended substance. This thing in the extended subject, when it is thought or perceived, becomes an idea—such a mode of extension acquires this relational denomination when it is thought about. A bit like in the following: in the dark, a light is focused onto a thing and the thing becomes visible. Here the lighted thing (idea) is identical with the thing that was previously unlighted (something in extension). The point is that an extended item becomes an idea when it is thought about. Ideas do not have their own kind of being even though singular thoughts have. If someone thinks of a tree, then this thinking as a process or performance

or operation or act is different from the tree. But the tree, through being thought about, becomes an idea. Because Spinoza's God thinks of everything there is, it is true of any thing that it exists also as an idea.

Much of what has been said above is controversial but also liberating. For example, Spinoza's identity theory gets a natural interpretation. In *Ethics* 2p8s, Spinoza presents that theory as follows:

> So, too, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways. This truth seems to have been glimpsed by some of the Hebrews, who hold that God, God's intellect, and the things understood by God are one and the same. For example, a circle existing in Nature and the idea of the existing circle-which is also in God-are one and the same thing, explicated through different attributes.

Spinoza's identity theory has often been seen as involving the claim that for him mental events are identical to physical processes. This, I believe, is not what Spinoza intended by the identity theory. Rather, his point is that we are, in perception or thought, in direct contact with the extended reality. Primarily, he is arguing for a version of direct realism.

Now that we have made a distinction between acts of thought (singular thoughts) and ideas we are in a better position to look at what Spinoza means by mind. Spinoza considers the origin of the human mind in 2p11 and 2p13:

> That which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is basically nothing else but the idea of an individual actually existing thing. (2p11)

> The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body—i.e., a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else. (2p13)

Above, I have argued that for Spinoza an idea is a mode of extension as thought about. So my mind is my body as thought about.[3] The question now becomes about the thinker—what or who is it? The tendency is to see this thinker as identical with the infinite substance God who is the only thinking substance; and there is no reason to go against this tendency. However, it should not be thought that all bodies are thought by one and the same subject. If someone distinct from me thinks of my body, that does not generate my mind; or at least it is incomprehensible how that could happen. How could my thought of a trout generate the mind of that trout? This problem is avoided in the interpretation proposed here. As a subject of thinking I am, or any individual thinker is, part of

God's essence or part of his infinite force, and it is not at all absurd to say that my mind is a body thought by me. In this conception my body would serve as a tablet on which external things leave their impressions and it is this that gives me the alphabet of thinking. For a mind to exist, as is self-evident or analytical, there has to be a subject thinking of an object; for Spinoza the subject is part of God's force and the first object of the thought is a body that the subject calls hers.

3. Hübner on Dependence Readings

From what has been said above, it follows that for Spinoza ideas require bodies. In fact, bodies become ideas in being thought about. So, there is no dualism of full-fledged ideas on the one hand and bodies on the other hand. However, a kind of dualism is still left. The power of thinking is, in my interpretation, distinct from the physical power of extension, each of which is a distinct expression of God's infinite essence.

Karolina Hübner has impressively and seriously criticized what she calls dependence readings. In these readings, according to Hübner, "the existence of [the] essential and constitutive intentional relation between human minds and bodies commits Spinoza to some sort of ontological and explanatory *dependence* of minds on bodies" (Hübner forthcoming).

My interpretation is certainly a dependence reading: Minds require a thinking subject and something this subject thinks about. I have claimed that the durational mind depends on its existence of the human body. This is something Spinoza quite clearly accepts in 2p13 cited above: a human mind is an idea of its body. Moreover, I have made a distinction between acts of thought, i.e., singular thoughts (*singulares cogitationes*) and ideas as the objects of those acts of thought. A human being for Spinoza is God-qua-finite thinking (act of thought) of a certain body. This body is an idea in being thought about. Hübner (forthcoming), summarizes her critical comments under three headings:

i. Identity: ". . . can minds genuinely ontologically depend on bodies if they are also numerically identical to them?"
ii. Barrier: ". . . any reading that treats an instance of thought such as a human mind as explanatorily dependent on a bit of physical reality, as Materialist Readings do, also violates Spinoza's commitment to Barrier, or to the explanatory closure of the attributes."
iii. ". . . the sort of explanatory dependence of the mental on the physical that is at the heart of Materialist Readings of the human mind also goes against Causal Cognition, that is, against the doctrine that any cognition of a thing is cognition of its causes. As entities of incommensurate kinds, minds and bodies cannot stand in causal relations to one another, on pain of unintelligibility. So, by Causal Cognition, they also cannot serve to explain one another, contrary to the central thesis of Materialist Readings."

Hübner, then, sees that dependence readings meet problems with Identity, Barrier, and Causal cognition.

The identity problem is "Can minds genuinely ontologically depend on bodies if they are also numerically identical to them?" This is a good point because it seems rather weird to claim that besides God perhaps, something could depend for its existence on itself. Such ontological self-dependence comes close to holding that there should be some kind of self-causation in the realm of finite things and this Spinoza flatly denies.

In my interpretation, a body's being a mind depends on its being thought about. Thus, were there no bodies there would be no minds because there would be nothing to think about. However, bodies are not dependent on minds in this way. The being of a body does not, as it were conceptually, require that it is also thought of. One might even suggest that extension, for Spinoza, is the material cause of the ideas whereas thinking is their efficient cause. A body's existing *as an idea* is dependent on the thinking activity. Moreover, singular thoughts, i.e. acts of thinking, which I think is what Spinoza means by *the formal being of ideas* are dependent on extension without being identical to them. However, ideas objectively taken, i.e. as objects of acts of thought, are identical to things in extension. So, there is no problem of a thing being its own cause.

The second critical point Hübner makes (i.e., the barrier problem) is that the properties ideas have depend on what they are about. In dependency readings ideas are about extended items, and, thus, knowing what an idea is depends on knowledge about extension. So, in these readings the attribute of thought is not conceivable in itself. But Spinoza clearly says that God's attributes are conceived through themselves and this can be seen to say that all the modes in a given attribute can be conceived without referring to other attributes. Thought and extension, however, are attributes of God whereas minds and bodies are modes of thought and extension respectively. Thus, it should be possible to give a characterization of minds, or more generally ideas, which does not involve conceptual content from extension. However, argues Hübner, this kind of self-conceivability within the attributes is violated in dependency readings.

This problem also depends on not making a distinction between the act and the idea. Thinking for Spinoza is a power the exercise of which depends on there being something that, as it were, transcends thought, but this does not mean that this thinking power is inherently such that it should be explicated through input from other attributes. This might be true of reductive materialistic readings, but Spinoza was not a reductive materialist. In fact, even if ideas are seen as representations of bodies distinct from the bodies themselves, the barrier problem arises in the form of the following dilemma. Let us say that there is an idea of the sun in someone's mind. Can we have any understanding of what this idea is without using spatial language? To understand what this idea is a representation of, to distinguish it from other ideas, it seems necessary to specify, for

example, the shape of the thing one is thinking about it. Moreover, if the characterization of such an idea or its aboutness would not require spatial concepts, what in it would make it represent something in extension and not also things in the other unknown attributes?

The causal cognition problem can be handled much the same way as the barrier problem. Let us continue with the light-analogy. There will be new objects and the light will be targeted on them. What causes the acts of lighting to happen or what is their efficient cause is not found in the objects and thus explaining and understanding why these acts happen does not require information from the objects. So when a change happens in my body, I perceive or think about my body as modified through this change. However, that I *direct* my perception to it does not explanatorily depend on anything extended but depends only on me being a thinking or perceiving thing.

4. Causal Series of Ideas

In this section, I will give an alternative to parallelism when parallelism is understood as saying that (i) ideas and bodies are full-fledged entities in their own right and there is a one-to-one correspondence between them; and (ii) causal relations between ideas are matched by causal relations between bodies and vice versa. This latter might be called structural isomorphism.

In parallelism readings, ideas correspond to their objects. So, if there is a causal series of bodies . . . A1. . . An . . . there is a corresponding causal series of ideas . . . I(A1) . . . I(An) . . . so that this latter series even though distinct from the former represents it.

My basic grumble with this, leaving Spinoza aside for a moment, is that I do not understand how there could be a realm of ideas, psychological entities that could have causal powers. It may be understandable how bodies could create a causal network—at least they are connected to each other through space. But there seems to be no connecting medium in the realm of pure ideas. One wonders how ideas can have causal force and how they can determine other ideas. It is true that some ideas lead somehow to other ideas like in association but to speak of individual mental events living in a realm of their own and somehow causally generating new ideas in a way that moving bodies may cause other bodies to move, does not make sense to me.

Let us now take a look at what Spinoza says of mental causation, and whether it conflicts with my interpretation. Here are two representative propositions from the beginning of the second part of the *Ethics*:

> The formal being of ideas recognizes God as its cause only insofar as he is considered as a thinking thing, and not insofar as he is explicated by any other attribute; that is, the ideas both of God's

> attributes and of individual things recognize as their efficient cause not the things of which they are ideas, that is, the things perceived, but God himself insofar as he is a thinking thing.
>
> (2p5)

> The idea of an individual thing existing in actuality has God for its cause not insofar as he is infinite but insofar as he is considered as affected by another idea of a thing existing in actuality, of which God is the cause insofar as he is affected by a third idea, and so ad infinitum.
>
> (2p9)

In 2p5 Spinoza speaks of the formal being of ideas. This is natural to interpret as the act of thought performed by God: an act that makes it appropriate to say that a body exists in the mind of God and is, thus, an idea.

So, causation of ideas happens within the attribute of thought. In 2p9, it is claimed that an idea is caused by God insofar as he is affected by another idea. This does not (at least not) directly say that ideas are caused by other ideas. Rather, what is indicated is a kind of agent-causationist model. It is "God insofar as he is a thinking thing" who causes ideas. This is in perfect conformity with what I have suggested. Ideas come into being, or perhaps better, bodies become ideas when they are thought about by God.

A case which seems to support causal power of ideas as such is association. I have seen somebody only once and on a bridge. Perhaps, if for some reason I come to think of her, this thought also leads to the thought of a bridge. Here the idea of the person causes the idea of the bridge. Let us see whether this is the way Spinoza would handle association:

> If the human body has once been affected by two or more bodies at the same time, when the mind afterward imagines one of them, it will straightway [*statim*] remember the others too.
>
> (E 2p18)

Proof

> The mind imagines (preceding Cor.) any given body for the following reason, that the human body is affected and conditioned by the impressions of an external body in the same way as it was affected when certain of its parts were acted upon by the external body. But, by hypothesis, the human mind was at that time conditioned in such a way that the mind imagined two bodies at the same time. Therefore, it will now also imagine two bodies at the same time, and the mind, in imagining one of them, will straightway remember the other as well.

If Spinoza's thought follows here what is given in parallelism with its atom like ideas floating in mental "space," explanation of association would need no reference to body. If somebody has perceived A and after that or simultaneously B, then the imagination of A (=idea) through laws of mental causation leads to the imagination of B (=idea.) But this not how Spinoza thinks of association as 2p18d shows, and I believe it is good Spinoza does proceed in that way. In association ideas do not just follow each other but the initial idea grows. You see a lightning and hear the thunder. When you imagine lighting later you will connect lightning to thunder. This is not idea A and then idea B -model but idea of A and B together. So in association it would make more sense to speak of an idea *growing*. The subject has an idea of A which grows into the idea of A and B. But to speak of mental items, purely as mental, growing is very hard to understand: it would require an elaborate theory of synthesis of mental items—something Kant perhaps tried to give. For Spinoza association is like scanning one's body: not adding distinct mental items to each other but seeing directly what happens in the body.

5. Conclusion

Spinoza's philosophy of mind cannot be understood without taking seriously his conviction that there is one thinking substance to whose activity all thoughts owe their being. However, once this is granted the problem of finite thinking subjects becomes acute. God is a thinking subject, but so am I. But what am I as a thinking thing? Perhaps just a bundle of ideas. This kind of thinking creates a kind of distance between us and God. Our whole being belongs to *natura naturata* which paints of us a completely passive picture. However, what I want to emphasize is that there is room for an infinity of subjects in God's essence. I am a thinker whose essence is constituted by a part of God's force or power, i.e., by a part of God's essence.

This opens up a way for reinterpreting mind and idea in Spinoza. A particular human mind is an act of thought by a certain subject having the human body as its object. The human body is like a tablet on which external things leave their marks. So the human body for Spinoza is very much like Kant's sensibility even though and, of course, body for Spinoza is a part of the infinite really existing physical space. In this interpretation, the relation of mind to body is like an intentional relation we are familiar with in perception. Can we take such a relation as basic and understandable in itself? I am tempted to answer in the affirmative, but be that as it may, Spinoza's theory of mind has the great virtue of explaining away the mind-body unity as an additional *sui generis* kind of connection. Basically, I am connected to my body the way I am, in perception, connected to space.

Notes

1 This and further references to Spinoza's works are to Spinoza 2002.
2 Some scholars suggest that Spinoza was a bundle theorist with respect to human minds but I find such interpretations implausible.
3 With Lilli Alanen, whom I want to thank for support and friendship, I agree on many things in Spinoza. However, here there is point of disagreement. In her perceptive essay "Spinoza on the Human Mind" Alanen writes that "this distinction between idea in the sense of mode or psychological act and idea in the sense of the object or logical content of the act (made by Descartes in AT 7 8 and AT 7 37) does little work for Spinoza (e.g., 2p11d)" (Alanen 2011, 11). I believe the distinction plays a crucial role also for Spinoza. Ideas as acts are not extended whereas their objects are.

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8 Spinoza and the Inferential Nature of Thought[1]

Karolina Hübner

This chapter makes a claim about how Spinoza understands the nature of thought. More specifically, it proposes that for Spinoza thought as such is *inferential:* to think is to infer, which, as a first pass, means to grasp the consequences or implications of what is being represented.

In what follows I flesh out this claim in more detail, and substantiate it textually. I also show that approaching Spinoza's epistemology through the framework of the notion of inference allows us to see many prima facie disparate epistemological doctrines—bearing on understanding, truth, adequacy, mental causality and the difference between intellect and imagination—as part of a single, unified account. In this respect, the contribution of the paper is primarily a systematizing one.

1

I will start with some terminological clarifications. First, Spinoza himself does not talk in terms of "inference", but rather in terms of "deducing [*concludere, deducere*]" and "following [*sequi*]".[2] By "inference" I mean whatever Spinoza himself means by those two terms; fleshing out what *that* is will be my primary task in what follows.

My second clarification concerns the term "thought". In this chapter, my claim about the "inferential nature of thought" is restricted to *divine veridical* thought, i.e. thought in what is for Spinoza its ontologically and explanatorily basic form (*Ethics* [E], 2p32).[3] According to Spinoza, all thinking is ultimately the activity of an omniscient, infallible substance; thinking done by finite knowers like ourselves is merely a partial expression of that activity (E2p11c). Spinoza also refuses to grant nonveridical thought its own distinct properties, taking it to be merely the state of (veridical) thought's incompleteness (E2p33). So falsehood, fiction, uncertainty, fuzziness, points of view, all crucial to thought as we know and experience it, are all secondary phenomena for Spinoza, requiring additional explanation and determinate causal mechanisms. That is, it is not qua thinking simpliciter that thinking can be erroneous, fictitious, perspectival, or unreliable; these become possible only once thought is

considered in isolated fragments. This means that even if the sort of thinking *we* engage in is to us a phenomenon of greater (introspective, intersubjective, ethical) significance, it's also the case that in Spinoza's framework it is possible (and, arguably, in the order of knowing necessary) to deal with thought as it exists in relation to substance alone first. This chapter is intended as an exercise in this sort of preliminary and incomplete clearing of the terrain, one that leaves the question of the inferential nature of thought as this manifests itself in specifically human experience for another time.

Here is one last terminological clarification: there is another term Spinoza has for this necessarily veridical thought: "understanding [*intelligere*]", or thinking done by an "intellect". For example, he writes:

> A true idea must agree with its object (by [E1]ax6), i.e. (as is known through itself), what is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in nature
>
> (E1p30d)[4]

This notion of "intellect" does not appear in discussions of Spinoza's epistemology as often as the better known categories of kinds of knowledge (imagination, reason, and intuition [E2p40s2]).[5] Spinozistic intellection ("understanding") includes both rational and intuitive thought. In other words, it is contrasted with the merely "imaginative" thinking capable of giving rise to false ideas (E2p41; cf. E1p15s[v] [II/59], E1app [II/82]).

2

With these terminological preliminaries out of the way, let me return to my main task, that of establishing the inferential nature of Spinozistic (intellectual) thought. Here is a passage where this conception of thought comes through particularly clearly:

> This proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the *intellect infers from the given definition of any thing* a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing) . . . [*Haec propositio unicuique manifesta esse debet si modo ad hoc attendat quod ex data cujuscunque rei definitione plures proprietates intellectus concludit, quae revera ex eadem (hoc est ipsa rei essentia) necessario sequuntur*]
>
> (E1p16d, emphasis added)

Note that Spinoza intends the above as a perfectly general claim about how the intellect relates to *any* thing. Presented with an essence—or, more precisely, with the representation of an essence in a "definition"

(e.g., E1p8s2)—an intellect proceeds to infer, Spinoza thinks, what *follows from* it. As is often emphasized, for Spinoza to understand a thing is to grasp its essence (and not for example some derivative property of that thing *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [TIE] [95]).[6] But this grasp of an essence is, I want to suggest here, furthermore *inseparable* from a grasp of its consequences. There is thus a certain type of dynamism, we could say, as well as a certain anti-atomism, proper to thought as Spinoza conceives of it: thought does not come to a rest when it grasps some essence as that essence, but goes on to generate further ideas—ideas of what follows, or is deducible, from the idea of that essence.

Spinoza says elsewhere that "many things" (presumably, properties) "are contained in each thing [*multa, quae continentur in unaquaque re*]" (TIE[63]), and also that there is no thing that does not have *some* effect (E1p34). So an intellectual grasp of the essence of *any* thing will give rise to further, inferentially connected ideas, with each inference unfolding some of what that essence "contains". Thus for instance, to use Spinoza's own favorite example (e.g. E1p17s [II/62]; E2p49d), understanding a triangle's essence will be inseparable from understanding, inter alia, that from this essence it follows that "its three angles are equal to two right angles". We can see here at least in part why Spinoza also holds that to understand is also to "act" (E2p43s, E3p59d), i.e. to produce some effect autonomously, without the help of "external" causes (E3def2): understanding is a case of genuine acting because nothing else is required to generate ideas of a triangle's properties other than the idea of its essence.

We are now also in a position to see how reflection on the idea of inference helps illuminate the difference between intellect (reason and intuition) and imagination. Namely, by virtue of the presence of inferential linkages between intellectual ideas—by virtue of what we could call the *systematicity* of such ideas—ideas formed by the active and autonomous power of the intellect will differ from imaginative ideas acquired through sense experience. Insofar as the latter are ideas of bodily modifications partially caused, at various times, by external causes, they are also "disconnected" from one another:

> I have distinguished between a true idea and other perceptions, and shown that the fictitious, the false, and the other ideas have their origin in the imagination, i.e., in certain sensations that are fortuitous [*fortuitis*], and (as it were) disconnected [*solutis*]; since they do not arise from the very power of the mind, but from external causes
>
> (TIE [84], transl. alt.)

Inference, for Spinoza, can produce genuine understanding because it can ground a property in an essence, by deriving it from that essence. In contrast, if we rely on sense experience alone, we may think of some property of a thing without genuinely understanding it—that is, without

knowing how to ground it in, or derive it from, a thing's essence. Hence Spinoza says, the "properties of things are not understood so long as their essences are not known" (TIE[95]).

3

We can now also perhaps see a little better the significance that *definitions* have within Spinoza's philosophy. There are different ways of thinking about things, and even different ways of thinking about their essences. By E1p34, *some* thing follows from every thing. So some content will be made available to thought if it forms the idea of *any* essence. But a "definition" for Spinoza is a specific manner of presenting a thing's essence as an object to thought: the way that allows us to infer *all* of a thing's properties:

> I require a concept, *or* definition, of the thing such that when it is considered alone, without any others conjoined, all the thing's properties can be deduced from it . . . That this is a necessary requirement of a definition is so plain through itself to the attentive that it does not seem worth taking time to demonstrate it.
>
> (TIE[95])

Intuitively we might want to say that an idea of God's essence and an idea of a cat's essence will differ in how many other ideas they can give rise to. Spinoza grants such intuitions, and indeed offers a relevant systematic rule: the more *real* something is, the greater the number of possible inferences. Hence his demonstration of E1p16 continues as follows:

> the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing); and . . . it infers more properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, i.e., the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves [*eo plures quo plus realitatis rei definitio exprimit hoc est quo plus realitatis rei definitae essentia involvit*].
>
> (E1p16d)

We could gloss the degree of represented ("objective") reality in terms of an idea's *intensional richness*: the richer, or more complex, the intension of the definition that serves as the ground of the inference—the more is "contained" in the relevant idea—the greater the number of possible inferences (where inferring "more" means either inferring a greater number of properties, or in a greater number of ways—for example, under different attributes [cf. E1p9]).[7] Thus our ideas of essences of different things will differ in how much thinking they allow us to do, in accordance with their

degree of objective reality or intensional richness. The definition of God, implicitly containing all possible realities, allows for the greatest advancement in thought, and so also the greatest emendation of the intellect.

4

Let me pause here briefly in my exposition to address two worries about the picture of Spinozistic inference as presented thus far.

First, the account seems beset by the following ambiguity. In E1p16d Spinoza talks in terms of inferring *properties* from essences. However, elsewhere what he describes as having been inferred are *truths* about properties.[8] So which is it? Two possible answers come to mind. First of all, we could see Spinoza's talk of inferring properties as a shorthand for a more precise talk of inference of truths about properties. Alternatively, we could explain this shifting between talk about properties and talk about truths about properties by the fact that for Spinoza concepts themselves can have propositional structure:[9] as he puts it, a "concept, i.e., idea", is a "connection of subject and predicate" (TIE[62]).

Here is a second worry about Spinoza's picture. As we have seen, Spinoza repeatedly insists on the self-evident nature of his claims. For example, he treats as self-evident the claim that thinking of a thing's essence is inseparable from thinking what that essence implies (E1p16d), and thinking *all* that it implies (TIE[95]). Is this not mere dogmatism on Spinoza's part? Here is one possible line of defense: perhaps on Spinoza's view such insights about the nature of thought are available to us through introspection—in the same way that, he believes, mere acquaintance with our own ideas makes it plain that we sense bodies and can only have ideas of bodies and of ideas (E2ax4–5).

5

There are two further aspects of Spinozistic inference to which I would like to draw our attention. The following passage, taken from Spinoza's argument for the claim that all things "strive" to persevere in being (E3p6), can serve as an introduction to both:

> the definition of any thing affirms, and does not deny, the thing's essence, *or* it posits the thing's essence, and does not take it away. So while I attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, I shall not be able to find anything in it which can destroy it, q.e.d. [*definitio enim cujuscunque rei ipsius rei essentiam affirmat sed non negat sive rei essentiam ponit sed non tollit. Dum itaque ad rem ipsam tantum, non autem ad causas externas attendimus, nihil in eadem poterimus invenire quod ipsam possit destruere*.]
>
> (E3p4)[10]

Spinoza's claim here is that if we understand a thing's essence, we will recognize that it is metaphysically impossible for that thing, of its own essential nature, to bring about a self-destructive effect or action—something inconsistent with this thing continuing to be essentially that same thing. This is because it is logically impossible for a thing's essence to imply its own negation.

I bring this passage into the discussion because, as noted, it spotlights two further features of Spinoza's inferential understanding of thought. The first of these is what we could call the *affirmative* nature of Spinozistic inference.[11] This inference is "affirmative" in the sense that its ground (in E3p4, the striver's essence, as stated in a definition) is explicitly conserved or reaffirmed in the inference: the inferred idea of a property does not, even partially, negate or contradict the idea of the essence from which it is deduced. For example, in understanding a triangle, to think of what follows from a triangle's essence does not require us to negate anything of the essence itself. (Think in contrast of the self-negating element in how Hegel conceives of the necessary movement of thought from one concept to another, for example, from "Being" to "Nothing".)[12]

In the above passage, Spinoza concludes from the logical properties of a definition to metaphysical truths about what effects or actions are metaphysically possible for the thing being defined, given its essential nature. To this extent the passage is a clear display of Spinoza's "rationalist" faith in the power of mere thought to discover metaphysical truths. This is the second feature of Spinozistic inference illuminated by E3p4: the power of inference to function as a method of *metaphysical discovery*.

In E3p4 inference allows us to discover truths about what effects or actions are metaphysically *possible* for a thing, given its essential nature. But I want to suggest that Spinoza holds an even stronger thesis: in his view, inference can give us a handle not merely on truths about possibles but also on truths about the world as it *actually* is, with all the determinate, "singular, changeable" (TIE[100]) things that occupy it. The TIE explicitly describes inference as a method of apriori "discovery" that allows us to arrive at ideas of individuals corresponding to ("agreeing" with) how these individuals actually are:

> so long as we are dealing with Investigation of things, we must never infer [*concludere*] anything from abstractions. . . [T]he best conclusion will have to be drawn from some particular affirmative essence, *or*, from a true and legitimate definition [*optima conclusio erit depromenda ab essentia aliqua particulari affirmativa, sive a vera et legitima definitione*]. For from universal axioms alone the intellect cannot descend to singulars [*ad singularia descendere*], since axioms extend to infinity, and do not determine the intellect to the contemplation of one singular thing rather than another [*nec intellectum magis ad unum, quam ad aliud singulare contemplandum,*

> *determinant*]. So the right way of discovery is to form thoughts from some given definition [*recta inveniendi via est ex data aliqua definitione cogitationes formare*].
>
> (TIE[93–4])

Earlier I described Spinozistic inference as a matter of generating further ideas on the grounds of a thing's definition, drawing out the greater or lesser variety of properties that the essence of this thing "contains". In the above passage Spinoza describes this inferential process as a way of giving *determinate* objects to thought—ideas of one thing or property rather than of another. But, according to the passage, these ideas are not merely of determinate things (as opposed to being more general or abstract); they are also true: they are ideas of extant "singulars".

In short, inference for Spinoza is a matter of providing thought with *true and determinate* contents. It is thus not a matter of purely *formal* relations between ideas, and not even of merely truth-*preserving* relations. Moreover, Spinoza explicitly ties thought's capacity for such truth-tracking precisely to the inferential structure of thought: true ideas, ideas that "agree with" how things actually are in nature, are those ideas that make possible an uninterrupted progress of inference; conversely, the possibility of making inferences is what distinguishes true ideas from false ones:

> when the mind attends to a thought—to weigh it, and deduce [*deducat*] from it, in good order, the things legitimately to be deduced from it—if it is false, the mind will uncover the falsity; but if it is true, the mind will continue successfully, without any interruption, to deduce true things from it. This, I say, is required for our purpose. [NS: For our thoughts cannot be determined from any other foundation. (*Nam ex nullo alio fundamento cogitationes nostrae determinari queunt*.)]
>
> (TIE[104])

Inference as Spinoza understands it is intrinsically truth-tracking insofar as we can infer only from true ideas, and keep inferring only if the inferred ideas in turn are also true. To return to an earlier idea, this is a further sense in which false ideas are "disconnected" (as are, as we saw earlier, all ideas formed on the basis of sense experience): false sensory ideas, unlike intellectual ideas, will be disconnected not just on account of their origins in different causal circumstances, as noted above, but also because of their incapacity for inferentially generating further ideas.

It is in the light of this contrast with sense experience that, I suggest, we read the last claim in the above passage, namely Spinoza's assertion that "our thoughts cannot be determined from any other foundation". The claim here is *not* that there is no other way of giving determinate content to our thoughts. Surely sense experience is also a way of determining our thoughts, albeit less systematically, more disconnectedly. But

sense experience, unlike intellectual inference, does not provide thought with a *foundation* or grounding for its determinations. As Spinoza says in the *Ethics*, ideas of bodies we happen to encounter are like conclusions without premises (E2p28d).

6

But why should only true ideas, not false ones, be able to give rise to further inferences? One may worry that this thesis is simply inconsistent with Spinoza's other epistemological commitments, in particular with E1p34, which as we have seen stipulates that every thing is a cause.[13] If E1p34 is true, it would seem that even false ideas must give rise to some effects—namely, to further ideas.

There are a couple of ways we could answer this worry.[14] Here is the first, which turns on Spinoza's metaphysics of falsehood. Recall that for Spinoza falsehood has no positive reality of its own. So in metaphysical rigor there can be no such thing as an idea that is *wholly* or simply false. Being nothing, such an "idea" also could not give rise to anything, on pain of violating the principle that *ex nihilo nihil fit* generally, and Spinoza's aforementioned rule of the proportionality of effects to the reality of the thing (E1p16d) more specifically.[15] If however what we mean by "false ideas" are incomplete composites of true simpler ideas, presumably it is not in the respect in which such composite ideas are false or incomplete that they give rise to inferences (since that respect is again in metaphysical rigor nothing); rather, false ideas in this incomplete-composite sense can give rise to inferences only insofar as they participate in truth, or consist of true simpler ideas. So once again, we arrive at the conclusion that only true ideas sustain inferences.

Here is a second way to answer the worry about the consistency of E1p34 with the inferential infertility of false ideas. We can interpret the latter as the claim that although false ideas (in the incomplete-composite sense) do indeed have further effects (as E1p34 requires), these effects are not *inferences* in the relevant sense. That is, they are not a matter of deriving ideas of effects or properties from ideas of essences. So false ideas will give rise to further ideas, but through other mental mechanisms—for instance, through mere association. Spinoza describes association precisely as a relation of ideas that lacks the kind of *intensional common ground* that is present in, and makes possible, an inferential relation (for example, between the essence of a triangle and the conclusion that the sum of its angles is equal to two right angles):

> from the thought of the word *pomum* a Roman will immediately pass to the thought of the fruit *which has no similarity to that articulate sound and nothing in common with it* except that the Body of

> the same man has often been affected by these two [NS: at the same time], i.e., that the man often heard the word *pomum* while he saw the fruit.
>
> (E2p18s, emphasis added)

7

Let me conclude by relating this discussion of the way inferential relations among ideas bear on these ideas' truth values, to the more familiar way of talking about truth in the context of Spinozistic epistemology, namely in terms of "adequacy".

To recall, according to Spinoza, all true ideas have the "extrinsic" quality of "agreeing" with their objects; but they also have "intrinsic denominations" that identify them as true without regard for the presence or absence of such agreements (E2def4).[16] Now, it would be natural to gloss "adequacy" as something akin to Cartesian clarity and distinctness. However, in my view at least, Spinoza appears to be generally disinterested in first-personal and phenomenological accounts of thinking; these are overshadowed in his writings by an impersonal, quasi-structural account of relations of ideas as they are in themselves.[17] So whether or not the gloss of "adequacy" as clarity and distinctness turns out to be correct in the end, I want to suggest that at the very least Spinoza also has something else in mind when he introduces the notion, namely the fact that inferential relations are truth-discovering. For following up on the consequences of our ideas is, in his eyes, a way of determining whether these ideas are true precisely by considering them alone, without regard for anything external. Conversely, Spinoza's belief that we can determine the truth or falsity of our ideas on inferential grounds alone can be seen as one reason why he would entertain the possibility of something like "adequacy", that is, why he would believe that an idea can carry its truth on its sleeve, so to speak. And this inferential criterion of adequacy seems to be a better fit with Spinoza's non-first personal, non-phenomenological methodology than any merely phenomenal criterion of clarity and distinctness.

I want to suggest that focusing on inferential relations among ideas also illuminates the "extrinsic", or world-facing, side of true ideas. This is because the existence of such inferential linkages makes possible the *correspondence* of thoughts to the formal reality of nature, a reality fundamentally structured by causal relations between the essences of things and their effects. Inferential relations, I suggest, provide the counterpart structure of ideas that allows there to be truth as the "extrinsic agreement" of veridical thought with the world:

> from what I have just said, that an idea must agree completely with its formal essence, it is evident that for my mind to reproduce completely

> the likeness of Nature, it must bring all of its ideas forth from that idea which represents the source and origin of the whole of Nature, so that that idea is also the source of the other ideas.
>
> (TIE[42]; cf. TIE[99])

Spinoza holds that ideas are capable of having the "same . . . order and connection" as the causally related "things" they represent (E2p7). In the *Ethics* he characterizes this counterpart mental order as one of "dependence" among ideas (E2p7d); but in the TIE this dependence is explicitly a causal one; it is a matter of ideas "interacting" with and "producing" other ideas:

> the idea is objectively in the same way as its object is really. So if there were something in Nature that did not interact with other things, and if there were an objective essence of that thing which would have to agree completely with its formal essence, then *that objective essence would not interact with other ideas, i.e., I could not infer anything about it*. [Note *p*: "To interact with other things is to produce, or be produced by, other things"] And conversely, those things that do interact with other things (as everything that exists in Nature does) will be understood, and *their objective essences will also have the same interaction, i.e., other ideas will be deduced from them*, and these again will interact with other ideas.
>
> (TIE[41]; emphases added)

In other words, another way inference provides a way of illuminating the Spinozistic notion of "truth" is by fleshing out what it means for ideas—often seen as paradigms of causal inertness—to enter into causal relations, thereby making possibly the mirroring of nature in the mind.

Notes

1 I'm grateful to Lilli Alanen, Deborah Brown, John Carriero, Sam Newlands, Justin Steinberg, the audiences at the UCLA Early Modern Philosophy workshop and the Tahoe Harvard Early Modern Philosophy workshop, and to many long conversations with Josefine Klingspor, for allowing me to refine the ideas in this chapter.

2 For a recent discussion of deductive links between Spinozistic ideas, see Peterman 2018.

3 I use Curley (trans. and ed.) 1984 throughout the chapter.

4 Cf. "what the true is, or the intellect" (TIE[68]).

5 But see Steinberg 2018, 191–3. Spinoza also uses the term "intellect" in a nominalized sense to pick out the products of understanding, i.e. collections of true ideas. Thus he talks about substance's "infinite intellect" (e.g. E1p17s, E2p3, E1p32c2), which is the true idea of everything.

6 Throughout the chapter I will assume (controversially) a continuity between Spinoza's views in the TIE and *Ethics*.

7 Leibniz suggests a similar link between intension and degree of reality in the *New Essays*: " 'Animal' comprises more individuals than 'man' does, but 'man' comprises more ideas or more attributes: one has more instances, the other more degrees of reality; one has the greater extension, the other the greater intension" (Leibniz 1996, 4.17).
8 This is the case with his triangle example: it is a certain truth about the sum of angles that is inferred from the essence. Similarly, what follows from the nature of substance is "God's existence" which is "an eternal truth [*Dei existentiam . . . aeternam esse veritatem*]" (E1p20c1).
9 I say "can have" to leave room for the possibility that Spinoza allows for simplest concepts that do not have propositional structure. Cf. "the ideas of things that are conceived clearly and distinctly, are either most simple, or composed of most simple ideas, i.e., deduced from most simple ideas" (TIE[68]). (Thanks to Sam Levey for pressing me on this.)
10 Cf. Spinoza's description of the law of inertia: "If, on the other hand, A is supposed to move, then as often as I attend only to A, I shall be able to affirm nothing concerning it except that it moves" (E2L3c).
11 For language of "affirmation", see e.g. TIE[93]. Thanks to Deborah Brown for discussion of this point.
12 See Hegel 1969.
13 The worry about inconsistency arises with assuming the consistency of Spinoza's commitments across the TIE and the *Ethics*; we could of course also forego that assumption.
14 My responses to this problem have been greatly helped by discussion with Justin Steinberg.
15 Not being a *res*, it also would not fall under the scope of E1p34.
16 For a recent discussion of adequacy, see Peterman 2018.
17 See in particular his dismissive account of ordinary self-understanding in 1App (II/78ff). Of course there are some very important exceptions to this general approach, especially E2ax4–5. For a very different take on Spinoza's method, see Renz 2011.

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9 Self-Consciousness and Consciousness of Self

Spinoza on Desire and Pride

Lisa Shapiro

Spinoza, in his *Ethics*, presents an account that has finite human beings moving from a position of ignorance to one of knowledge—from inadequate ideas to adequate ideas, from passivity to activity, and from bondage to freedom. While there is much agreement about the general picture, just how we move away from our original position of ignorance is less clear. In thinking about this general question, commentators have tended to focus on understanding the conceptual relations that structure the question—the relations between ignorance and knowledge, inadequate and adequate ideas, passivity and activity, but also between knowledge and power (or activity), though less so between ignorance and passivity. Just what it is that is doing the moving has often gone missing in the discussion. Perhaps that oversight has been due to the apparent disappearance of any individual once the whole of Nature is grasped, as much as to interpreters' ambitions to arrive at that end sooner rather than later.

Lilli Alanen's work has been an exception to this, insofar as she has aimed to articulate how Spinoza thinks we move from being patients in the world to being agents, in understanding his account of the passions, and in particular the way in which he takes us to free ourselves from their bondage. In her paper "Spinoza on Passions and Self-Knowledge: The Case of Pride,"[1] Alanen asks whether it is the same individual moving from one point to the next along the path to freedom (or to knowledge or to adequate ideas or to power):

> But is it that in understanding the causes of one's passive states, one becomes an agent with respect to those same states, or is it that increased activity in general so modifies the dynamics of the soul that the particular passion one suffered from, ceases to be, or, at least, ceases to be dominant?
>
> (Alanen 2012, 235)

To answer this question, Alanen proposes to understand just what Spinoza takes the individual, the subject experiencing the affects to be, for in

understanding that subject, we can better see whether there is a continuity along the path to freedom.

The issue, however, is understanding just what the Spinozist subject is. Unlike Descartes, there is no *res cogitans* whose very existence defines the subject, and also the individual. For Alanen, Spinoza's idea of the subject, that is, the self, is to be found in his account of *superbia*, or pride, and its companion concept *acquiescientia in se ipso*, or what is often translated as self-contentment. For Spinoza, while a finite thing is affected by other finite things, it need not either be aware of or represent what affects it. And equally, it need not be aware of or represent itself. It certainly need not represent itself veridically or adequately. This comes out clearly in his account of pride, and in experiencing self-contentment we correct at least some of those errors in our self-conception through a more adequate apprehension of the causal situation of the same individual. Thus, there does seem to be a continuity between the subject (and object) of pride and that of self-contentment as the distortions of the former are corrected in the latter. Alanen's question focuses on whether that continuity can be preserved in a complete apprehension of Nature, *sub specie aeternitatis*. That is, she considers the impact of the increase in understanding, and the move towards freedom, on the continuing existence of an individual. In this chapter I examine the smaller preliminary question of what it is for an individual to represent itself in the first place, for Spinoza.

I proceed in three steps. I look first at the primary affect of desire which Spinoza initially defines as a consciousness of appetite, and I aim to elucidate in just what this self-consciousness consists. I then turn to pride and *acquiescientia in se ipso* and distinguish them as varieties of consciousness of self. In clarifying the distinction between these two, I suggest, we can perhaps see the way towards freedom (and to true *acquiescientia in se ipso*) more clearly.

1. Desire: Self-Consciousness[2]

Spinoza first introduces and defines the concept of desire in the scholium to E3p9:

> Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious [*conscii*] of their appetite. So *desire* can be defined as *Appetite together with consciousness of the appetite*. [*Cupiditas est appetitus cum ejusdem conscientiâ*.]
>
> (GII 148; E3p9sch)[3]

Taken out of context in this way, the claim does not seem particularly problematic. We have all kinds of appetites through which we are moved

to preserve ourselves in existence. We experience desires, however, in so far as those natural impulses come to our attention. We are not simply moved towards food, but we *want* food, the late summer peach sitting on the table. But Spinoza's explication here must contain more than this. To see this we need to look a bit more closely at the immediate context of E3p9 as well as at the proposition itself.

In E3p6 Spinoza claims that "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its own being," and in E3p7 he goes on to assert that this striving, or *conatus*, is "nothing but the actual essence of the thing." As introduced the notion of *conatus* is a wholly general concept, applying to each singular thing, irrespective of the attribute under which it is conceived. In E3p9, this general notion of *conatus* is expressly applied to a human mind.

> Both insofar as the mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives [*conatur*], for an indefinite duration, to preserve [itself] in its being [*in suo esse per severare*] and it is conscious of this striving it has [*hujus sui conatus est conscia*].
>
> (GII 147)

The proposition highlights two features of the *conatus,* or striving proper to the human mind. First, it is in virtue of both the clear and distinct and the confused ideas constituting a human mind that the mind strives to persevere. Second, the *conatus* of the human mind entails consciousness of itself.

The presupposition of E3p9 that the human mind is constituted by both clear and distinct and confused ideas, as the demonstration makes clear, draws attention to the fact that both adequate and inadequate ideas figure in the human mind. An adequate idea, as defined in E2d4, is a true idea insofar as it is considered in itself—that is, to comprehend it fully, one need only consider the idea itself, and not any other idea external to it. In E2p38 and E2p38c, Spinoza identifies ideas, or notions, that are common to all as adequate ideas,[4] and presumably we can take it that the human mind contains adequate ideas insofar as it contains these common notions. I will not have more to say about this aspect of the human mind. An inadequate idea, by contrast, does not contain in itself the conditions of its own truth. The explication of its content depends on that of other ideas, and insofar as the chain of logical dependencies between ideas are as infinite as the chain of causal dependencies of finite bodies (E1p28), that explication may be necessarily incomplete. Imaginations are perhaps the paradigm case of inadequate ideas.

The second claim of E3p9, that the mind is conscious of its own striving or *conatus*, is more challenging to understand, and it is this claim that complicates our understanding of desire. In the scholium, prior to the passage initially cited, Spinoza distinguishes between will and appetite.

Will is our striving referred to the mind alone; whereas the appetite is referred to mind and body together. Further, Spinoza defines appetite as "the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follows those things that promote his preservation" (GII 147). Our appetites serve our self-preservation, and clearly pertain to our bodily needs and the mental manifestation of those needs. Our appetite just is our striving to persevere as the things we are, and so is our essence. Insofar as appetite is this striving, we should by E3p9, be conscious of it. Plausibly, insofar as our appetites move us to act to satisfy those appetites, we are conscious of them. But if we are conscious of our appetites, how are desires any different from appetites?

I want to propose an answer to this puzzle. Note that Spinoza here uses two distinct, though, closely related terms: *conscius* and *conscientia*. The former term is repeated in the proposition, its demonstration and scholium, but the latter term is only used in the definition of desire. *Conscius* connotes a knowing, that is, an awareness, of good and evil, that is in process. I take the use of that term in this proposition to indicate that *conatus*—striving to persevere in one's being—in humans is the movement or direction through which we distinguish good and evil *for us*. Insofar as its *conatus* is the actual essence of it as a thing, the human mind has an innate awareness (or knowing) of good and evil—it is conscious of its own striving to persevere. This point applies to both will and appetite. Desire, however, involves *conscientia*, the nominative, and so the fixed form of the verb. *Conscientia* also involves an awareness of good and evil, but that awareness is articulated, or, we might say, it involves a self-awareness of our awareness of a thing as good.[5] So when I have an appetite for an apple, I am aware of *an apple* insofar as it is good for me and I am moved towards eating it. When I desire an apple, I not only am aware of an apple insofar as it is good for me and moved towards it, but I also am aware of my awareness of the apple insofar as it is good for me, for in desiring it I assert the apple is good and direct myself towards it.[6]

If this is correct then appetite and desire each involve a kind of self-consciousness, which are nonetheless subtly distinct. Appetites reflect a consciousness of my essence—my striving to persevere in existence—insofar as my perceiving things as good (or bad) for me involves my distinctive perspective. In desiring something, that self-awareness goes beyond inhabiting a distinctive perspective to asserting that perspective, asserting that something is good *for me*. The relevant distinction here is between remaining implicit and having been made explicit. I inhabit my distinct perspective by simply moving about as I do—say, weaving through the other pedestrians on the sidewalk. I assert my perspective in calling attention to it—say, when I hold my ground against an oncoming pedestrian.[7]

Notice that though both our appetites and desires can be misguided—we can strive for things that ultimately undermine our continued existence—they are only misguided because of the interference of external

causes. In these cases, we experience the sadness of a diminished power to persevere. And in those cases in which our appetites and desires are satisfied, in which external causes cooperate with us and we continue to exist, we experience joy.

What is less clear is whether our desires can misconstrue our appetites. In his Definition of the Affects (DA), Spinoza defines desire: "Desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something" (DA1). In the explication, he identifies appetite and desire—"I really recognize no difference between human appetite and desire." (DA1exp)—suggesting that there can be no room for error. Yet in the next sentence, Spinoza does open room for a gap between the two: "For whether a man is conscious of his appetite or not, the appetite still remains one and the same." It seems, then, that though our appetites remain consistent, our awareness of our appetites can be more or less complete. Our desires can leave obscure some parts of what we are striving towards. Spinoza's further explication of this point suggests that our desires, or consciousness of our appetites, are a result of how we are affected by things—both internal and external causes:

> For I could have said that desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined to do something. But from this definition (by E2p23) it would not follow that the mind could be conscious of its desire, *or* appetite. Therefore, *in order to involve the cause of this consciousness*, it was necessary (by the same proposition) to add: *insofar as it is conceived, from some given affection of it, to be determined*, and so on.
>
> (GII 190; DA1exp; underlined emphasis added)

It seems then that our desire is that aspect of our essence, our striving to persevere, that is brought to our attention in virtue of the way we are affected by things (both internal and external). I take Spinoza's point here to be that with desire, we have self-consciousness: That is, we are self-conscious from the particular perspective we find ourselves in the world.

2. Pride and *Acquiescientia in se ipso*: Consciousness of Self

Let me now turn to pride. Spinoza introduces the affect of pride or *superbia* in the scholium of E3p26. That proposition and the one preceding it (E3p25) are the first propositions in which Spinoza considers *our striving to affirm* what affects us with joy and to deny what affects us with sadness.

> **E3p25**: We strive to affirm, concerning ourselves and what we love, whatever we imagine to affect with joy ourselves or what we love. On the other hand, we strive to deny whatever we imagine affects with sadness ourselves or what we love.

> **E3p26:** We strive to affirm, concerning what we hate, whatever we imagine to affect it with sadness, and on the other hand to deny whatever we imagine to affect it with joy. (GII 159)

E3p25 follows from E3p21, which simply describes the way we *are* affected with joy in imagining things we love as affected with joy, in that we by our nature strive to imagine, to take as present, what affects us with joy (or increases our power of acting (E3p12)). E3p26 follows from E3p23 in a similar way, as that proposition simply describes *that* we take joy in imagining things that sadden what we hate.

The scholium of E3p26 takes the reflexive case as the first instance of this striving to affirm:

> When this imagination concerns the man himself who thinks more highly of himself than is just, it is called pride [*superbia*], and is a species of madness, because the man dreams, with open eyes, that he can do all those things which he achieves only in his imagination, and which he therefore regards as real and triumphs in, so long as he cannot imagine those things which exclude the existence [of these achievements] and determine his power of acting.
>
> (GII 159, E3p26s.)

At the end of the scholium, pride [*superbia*] is defined as the joy arising from our unjust (positive) estimation of ourselves. We can see how this works. Love is joy connected with an imagined object. Insofar as we love ourselves, we have joy with an imagination of ourselves. Pride, then, is an affirmation of a joy connected to an imagination of ourselves, or an affirmation of a love of ourselves. It focuses our attention on what we find empowering and distracts us from what might bring us down. In this way, pride effectively closes off our idea of ourselves from any countervailing evidence, and acts to amplify our self-love.

It is worth pausing to consider how 'striving to affirm' furthers Spinoza's discussion. As I read the propositions 3p12–24, Spinoza is explaining how the way we are affected is tied to our perceptions of things, which in Spinoza's terms, is simply our imagining what we do. Imagining, for Spinoza, is taking something to be present; that is, an imagination is an appearance of something. But in 2p49s, Spinoza denies that there is any distinction in having an idea and affirming it. That is just what it is to take something as present. Nonetheless, there does seem to be something added to our *striving* to affirm. In striving to affirm what we imagine, we further insist that appearances are the way things actually are. But of course, appearances can be deceiving. When we affirm what we imagine we can (and often do) go wrong. When we strive to affirm what we imagine, the risk of error only increases.

Spinoza's point about pride is twofold. First, pride is importantly different from desire, that is, our being conscious of our essence or striving to continue to exist. In pride, we imagine our self. That is, we appear to ourselves as a particular thing, with an array of properties. We affirm of ourselves that we have those properties, and moreover, strive to persist in that affirmation. Our imagining ourselves, just as our imagining other things is rooted in our being affected with joy and sadness, and following E3p25 and p26, we affirm what we imagine to affect us with joy and deny that which affects us with sadness. When we attribute to ourselves qualities that we take to empower us, that is, which bring us joy, we affirm those qualities of ourselves, just as we deny that we possess qualities that we take to weaken us. Spinoza's second point is that appearances of ourselves can be mistaken, even and perhaps especially those we strive to affirm. We can be wrong about what qualities we possess, we can be wrong about whether and the degree to which qualities empower or weaken us, we can be wrong about the sources of our joy and sadness. So we can be wrong about ourselves, that is wrong about what we are as individuals.

While Spinoza's discussion of pride makes self-knowledge seem somewhat hopeless, E3p30 provides a subtly different story of how we come to imagine ourselves.

> If someone has done something which he imagines affects others with joy, he will be affected with joy accompanied by the idea of himself as cause, or he will regard himself with joy. If, on the other hand, he has done something which he imagines affects others with sadness, he will regard himself with sadness.
>
> (GII 163, E3p30)

On the face of it, this proposition does not seem that different from the earlier propositions (E3p25 and p26) which also looked at what affects ourselves and others with joy and sadness, and which evoked a remark about our unjust assessments of things. However, the demonstration of E3p30 hangs on E3p27:

> If we imagine a thing like us, *toward which we have had no affect*, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect.
>
> (GII 160, E3p27, emphasis added)[8]

E3p25 and p26 presupposed that we loved or hated another thing. The key difference between this proposition and the others is whether there is some initial affective affinity between ourselves and another individual or not; E3p30 takes our connection to another to be merely one of resemblance. This resemblance alone is sufficient to cause what Spinoza terms an imitation of the affects, so that we feel joy at another's joy

(which does not seem to have a name), sadness upon another's sadness (pity), and desire upon another's desire (emulation). In the scholium and corollaries to 3p27, Spinoza goes on to detail how this imitation of the affects is achieved through our *imaginings* of the affective lives of others. Through this imaginative identification with others, we generate affects in ourselves—pity, emulation—through which we are moved to act on the others' behalf—the benevolence to free a suffering individual like us from the source of its suffering or on our own. Interestingly, *these* imaginings, the ones that begin from a position of affective indifference, do not seem to suffer the same distortions and mischaracterizations of those alluded to in the immediately preceding propositions (those concerning pride). It seems that the lack of a strong prior affective relationship between ourselves and others allows for our imagination to be less distorted. These imaginations of affective responses of others are not complicated by the affective relations we stand in to them, but rather are a matter of the imagined resemblances between us.

The demonstration of E3p30 continues by noting that "man is conscious of himself through the affections by which he is determined to act," (appealing to 2p19 and 2p23), and from there concluding that "he who has done something which he imagines affects others with joy will be affected with joy, together with a consciousness of himself as the cause, or he will regard himself with joy, and the converse" (G II 163, E3p30dem). What Spinoza seems to intend here is that in order to imagine oneself as the cause of another's joy one must oneself be affected with joy and aware of that joy—for seeing oneself as a cause entails one's own power (which just is joy)—and equally that one can become aware of one's own joy, and so of one's power, by seeing oneself as the cause of another's joy. For the scholium of E3P30 notes that this joy insofar as it is accompanied with an idea of an *internal* cause (rather than of an external cause) is not, properly speaking love, but rather *acquiescentia in se ipso*.

Spinoza is often read here as articulating an alternative to *superbia*, contrasting a proper sense of self with the inflated and distorted sense of self of pride. But the scholium concludes with a remark that one can go wrong in experiencing *acquiescientia in se ipso* too. One can be mistaken that one is bringing joy to others—in fact, one can be 'burdensome' to all. This sense of how we can go wrong is reiterated in E3p51s, as is the definition of self-esteem. In that proposition Spinoza notes not only can we each be affected differently than others by the same object, we each can be differently affected ourselves at different times. Insofar as our judgments derive from affects, and because our affects are inconstant, we can go wrong. And equally we can go wrong because we often only imagine what will bring joy and sadness. This is the case as much in cases of repentance, when we see ourselves as cause of sadness, as it is in self-esteem, when we see ourselves as cause of joy. So it is not simply that *acquiescentia in se ipso* is correct while *superbia* is wrong.

Rather what distinguishes the two is the *basis* for our self-conception. Pride or *superbia*, in virtue of its foundation in how we are affected by things, effectively involves taking credit for something that while ours, comes to us from outside of us, and so is beyond what is properly ours. It is as if we are in an echo chamber, in which an initial peep bounces off the walls to become a much bigger sound that drowns out everything else. *Acquiescentia in se ipso* derives not from how we are affected, but rather from how we affect others, and entails an inference from those effects to our own power as a cause. *Acquiescientia in se ipso* is often translated as self-esteem but quite literally it means to become or to rest in oneself. To rest in oneself or become oneself for Spinoza is to begin to grasp oneself as a cause.

It is worth noting that the distinction between these two senses of self is not as stark as it is sometimes painted to be. In E3p55s Spinoza seems to connect self-esteem and *superbia*:

> But joy arising from considering ourselves is called self-love or self-esteem. And since this is renewed as often as a man considers his virtues, or his power of acting, it also happens that everyone is anxious to tell his own deeds, and show off his powers, both of body and of mind and that men, for this reason are troublesome to one another.
>
> (GII 183, E3p55s)

And he goes on to note that our natural envy leads us to find joy in others' weakness and to find singularity in our own actions (a uniqueness which seems to indicate our own perfection in that if we alone exhibit the effect, we must be the sole cause of it). Even if we recognize that our power is the proper measure of our value, we can find ways to exaggerate that power with respect to the powers of others. Nonetheless, there remains an important difference between *superbia* and *acquiescentia in se ipso*: the former arises from affirming an affective response; the latter arises from a consideration of the causal relations in which we stand.

3. Different Senses of Self-consciousness and the Power of Imagination

My aim so far has been somewhat modest: to bring out different senses of self-awareness or self-consciousness in operation within Part 3 of Spinoza's *Ethics*. In being the particular finite things we are, we strive to persevere, or have appetites that move us to continue in existence. Insofar as we are so moved, we are conscious of our essence or striving. But as we are affected by external things, we are focused on different aspects of our essence. Our desires are just this selective direction to what it takes to continue to exist at any given moment. Desires still involve a consciousness of our essence, but, as with appetites, this

consciousness does not take our essence as an object for examination, but rather intrinsically involves awareness of our distinctive perspective in being moved to *pursue* something. Insofar as our consciousness of our appetites, our desires, are caused by our being affected (DA 1),[9] our desires always involve a selective direction, and so are necessarily inadequate ideas, intrinsically incomplete reflections of our essence and so erroneous.

Pride involves a different species of self-consciousness, what might be better called consciousness of self. That is, we imagine ourselves and thereby take ourselves as an object present to us, ascribing ourselves properties, and powers. *Aquiescentia in se ipso* also involves this imagination of a self. But there is an important difference between the two.

With pride, our consciousness of self derives from our affective relations to others and the ways in which they reflect back on us. We love something (that is, it brings us joy), and some other thing brings it joy, and so we in turn love what brings that joy to our beloved. I feel pride when what brings joy to my beloved is just me. So my beloved brings me joy, in virtue of its being my beloved, and its joy in me, makes me love myself. My own feelings of empowerment are amplified in reflection. But that amplification has no grounding in any power that I actually have. It is simply the sense of self that comes when those I like because of the way they affect me like me back. While this sense of self can be a good thing, there are a litany of standard cases where it runs amok—the cliques that invariably take over high school social orders, the politician that surrounds himself with yes-men, and so on.

Aquiescentia in se ipso also provides a conception of self, but in this case, while we derive our imagination of self from the affective response of others to us, those others stand at an affective remove. They might resemble us, but they (as yet) do not stand to benefit or harm us in our continued existence in any way. In seeing ourselves—our power—in others we do not have our own measure of valuation reflected back upon us, but rather are able to gain a degree of objectivity of how we affect others, that is, of the causal relations that we stand in to them. We can here also be mistaken about ourselves. But Spinoza seems to suggest that our errors here are not about the fact of our power, but about its degree, or rather the degree to which we are unique in possessing that power. We need to work on placing our power in perspective to the other powers that be. I take it that Spinoza's point here is that we can never get to any kind of knowledge of nature if we remain in the echo chamber of our affective responses. We stand a chance, however, if we begin to grasp the reasons we affect things as we do. Once we understand our own causal efficacy, we can use that as the lever through which to understand the causal efficacy of others, and so begin to grasp the causal order as a whole.

4. Conclusion: Self-consciousness, Consciousness of Self, and Self-perfection

Alanen's interest in pride and in *aquiescentia in se ipso* rests in the question of how we can move from the imperfect consciousness of self to the domain of adequate ideas that is the end of the *Ethics*. For it is there that Spinoza introduces yet another dimension: *true* self-esteem. I have focused on the beginning of the story, and I have tried to lay out the complicated role imagination plays in our efforts to improve ourselves. We begin to have an idea of ourselves (as an object) in relations to others through our ideas of them and of the ways in which we are affected by them. But these initial self-conceptions, insofar as they are derived wholly from the ways in which things affect us, are necessarily distorted (and usually exaggerated in our favor). Our imagination of our selves begins to be corrected once we find ourselves in a situation where we stand in relation to things—through resemblance—by which we have been previously unaffected. In this kind of laboratory environment we can get a perspective on (be affected by) how we affect others like us and so take a measure of our own power. Even here, while we might have a better grip on our own abilities, we are prone to error about the relation our own power with respect to that of others. We can see then how lending structure to our relationships with others—the work of Part 4 of the *Ethics*—can assist in our gaining better perspective on ourselves.

This story is consistent with the way in which Spinoza characterizes the 'remedy of the affects' in the first half of Part 5 of the *Ethics*. There, Spinoza notes that "each us of us has—in part, at least, if not absolutely—the power to understand himself and his affects, and consequently, the power to bring it about that he is less acted on by them" (GII 283, E5p4s), that is, "we have the power of ordering and connecting the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect" (E5p10). In determining the order and connection of ourselves to others and in particular to others like us, we both come to know the world and come to know ourselves, and through that knowledge finding ourselves to be less affected by things. As Spinoza further notes, however, "so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects" we do best

> to conceive a correct principle of living, *or* sure maxims of life, to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life. In this way our imagination will be extensively affected by them, and we shall always have them ready.
>
> (GII 287, E5p10s)

Under conditions of imperfect knowledge, we are to continue to rely on our imagination to steer us towards virtue. For the maxims we devise

for conducting ourselves while approximating reason, themselves affect us and thereby impact our temperament and so the effects of passive affects.[10] Insofar as these maxims involve the imagination, it is worth highlighting, they also not only presuppose our particular perspective as individuals—what it is to imagine to take things as present *to us*—but they also involve our imagining ourselves as the same individual over time. For in putting forward these maxims we are asserting ourselves as the individuals we are and as those individuals gaining control of the way in which we are affected by things.

However, Spinoza also maintains that "the greatest satisfaction of mind there can be arises from this third kind of knowledge" (GII 297, E5p27), that is, from what in E2p40s2 is defined as the "intuitive knowledge. . . [that] proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things" (GII 122, E2p40s2). The question that remains is whether the mind that experiences this joy and intellectual love of God is the mind of a particular individual, and indeed the same individual who began the process of arriving at understanding with imperfect and inadequate ideas of imagination. In E5p36, Spinoza maintains that "the mind's intellectual love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself," which suggests that the mind that intuits is not the mind of a particular individual. However, the proposition continues, clarifying that "it is not insofar as it [God] is infinite, but insofar as it can be explained by the human mind's essence, considered *sub specie aeternitatis*" (GII 302, E5p36). While less than clear, this does seem to entail that intellectual love of God entails an apprehension of the determinate thing that is the human mind—as Spinoza puts it in the demonstration, this love is "an action by which the mind contemplates [*contemplatur*] itself, with the accompanying idea of God as its cause" (*ibid*.), which is the same action "as that by God insofar as it can be explained through the human mind, contemplates itself, with the accompanying idea of itself" (*ibid*.).[11]

One might well wonder just how the action whereby the mind contemplates itself can be the same as that whereby God contemplates itself. It should be clear that whatever God's contemplation is, it is not an act of imagination, and so the mind in contemplating itself does not imagine itself, that is, present itself as an object. In this regard, it is interesting to note Spinoza's language at the very end of the work. In the E5p42s, in contrasting the ignorant and the wise person he writes:

> For not only is the ignorant man troubled in many ways by external causes, and unable ever to possess true peace of mind [*vera animi acquiescentia*], but also lives as if he knew neither himself, nor God, nor things; and as soon as he ceases to be acted on, he ceases to be. On the other hand, the wise man, insofar as he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, *conscious*

> of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be [*sed sui, & Dei & rerum aeterna quadam necessitate conscius, nunquam esse desinit*] but also possess true peace of mind [*vera animi acquiescentia*].

If I am correct that the term '*conscius*' connotes an awareness that does not yet entail that determinate object of awareness that comes from turning attention to one's awareness, we can see the end of Spinoza's *Ethics* as a simple apprehension of the desire, the *conatus*, through which we strive to persevere, to keep in tune with the causal order. There is a sense in which this desire can be called a self, for it constitutes our essence, and there is a further sense in which it is also the same self as that which we so poorly understand in our ignorance. However, insofar as the imaginative understanding we have of ourselves is imperfect, there is also a sense in which the self we imagine ourselves to be, whether it be in pride or in an appropriate self-contentment, is wholly different from that of our intuitive understanding.

Notes

1 Alanen (2012) in *Emotion and Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*. Her thoughts on this topic are continued in Alanen 2017.
2 The discussion in this section is taken from Shapiro 2017.
3 All citations from Spinoza refer first to Spinoza 1925, (by 'G' followed by volume and page). English translations are from Spinoza (1985, 2016) with occasional modifications. For citations from the *Ethics*, I use the following abbreviations: the first numeral refers to part; 'p' means proposition; 'd' means definition; 'c' means corollary; 's' means scholium, 'dem' means demonstration, 'exp' means explication; e.g., 3p9s means *Ethics*, part 3, proposition 9, scholium.
4 It is not clear whether there are any other ideas he takes to be conceived adequately by the human mind.
5 The distinction I am suggesting exists between appetite and desire as akin to that drawn between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* in Part 1 of the *Ethics*. *Natura naturans* is that way of being Nature is that proper to a substance and so "what is in itself and is conceived through itself," whereas *Natura naturata* concerns what follows from Nature, that is, the modes of God's attributes, which "can neither be nor be conceived without God" (GII 71, E1p29sch). Clearly, the human mind is not a substance, but rather a mode of Nature within Spinoza's metaphysics, so there must be important differences. Nonetheless, it might be helpful to think of desires as if they are modes of appetites, insofar as this way of thinking helps in understanding different senses of self-knowledge in play. Insofar as we are modes of God, we are God and have divine knowledge, but insofar as we are only modes of God, that knowledge is partial. Insofar as our appetites constitute our essence, they define us as the complete individuals we are, and it must be that in just being what we are we have knowledge of our nature. But similar to the way we as modes have incomplete knowledge of God, so too our desires afford us incomplete awareness of our essence or appetites.
6 For more detailed discussions of Spinoza's account of consciousness, see Nadler 2008; Garrett 2008; LeBuffe 2010; Marshall 2013. These accounts focus

on how Spinoza conceives of consciousness, and its relation to thought. My own view is aligned more with Garrett and Marshall.

7 I am thinking of the antihero in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* here.

8 Spinoza here seems to be examining a scenario that is something like the converse of E3p16: "From the mere fact that we imagine a thing to have some likeness to an object which usually affects the mind with joy or sadness, we love it or hate it, even though that in which the thing is like the object is not the efficient cause of those affects" (GII 152–53, E3p16). In E3p27, what is central is the imagined likeness of things to us: that imagined likeness alone is enough to generate affects in us. In E3p16, the claim is that being affected by a thing is primary, and that affect is sufficient to generate similar feeling towards other things we imagine to be like it.

9 "Therefore, *in order to involve the cause of this consciousness*, it was necessary (by the same proposition) to add: *insofar as it is conceived, from some given affection of it, to be determined,* and so on" (GII 190, DA 1, emphasis added).

10 Spinoza seems to think that if we practice following the rules we set for ourselves, we will "soon be able to direct most of [our] actions according to the command of reason" (GII 289, E5p10s), thus faking it until we make it.

11 I have modified Curley's translation here. Curley assigns God a personal pronoun—'he' and 'himself'—which obscures what is at stake interpretively here. I prefer the neutral 'it' and 'itself' to refer to God or the whole of Nature.

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10 Spinoza on Activity and Passivity

The Problematic Definition Revisited

Valtteri Viljanen

The Eleatic Stranger of Plato's *Sophist* suggests that "anything has real being that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect [*to poiein*] anything else or to be affected [*to pathein*]" (*Soph.* 247d–e). For Aristotle of the *Categories* (2a3–4; CWA I, 4), activity or "doing: cutting, burning" and passivity or "being-affected: being-cut, being-burned" belong to the ten highest categories. Ever since, the notion of activity and passivity, or to put the issue more colloquially, the conviction that a line can be drawn between those things that *do* or *make happen* and those that *undergo* has formed part and parcel of the Western intellectual outlook. Thus, it is no surprise that it can also be found in Descartes's and Spinoza's writings, and the distinction receives its very own—and rather intricate—definition, E3d2, in the *Ethics*. Indeed, Spinoza's ethical project, according to which the central goal is to become as active and as little passive as possible, is closely tied to the distinction. Despite this, the crucial definition poses such difficult interpretative problems that it is far from clear what, exactly, Spinoza means by activity and passivity.

I will begin this chapter by outlining the basic idea of the definition (section 1) and situating it in its historical context (section 2). Then I will analyze, and offer a solution to, a problem that has been seen to plague Spinoza's definition of activity (section 3). After this, I will turn my attention to the definition of passivity, discuss a puzzling feature in it, and show how my interpretation can throw light on the way in which Spinoza thinks about the nature of passive affects or emotions (section 4). I hope that the resulting reading increases our understanding of Spinoza's theory of activity and passivity, which underpins much of his moral psychology and his view of happiness.

1. The Definition Outlined

Before defining activity and passivity, Spinoza tells us what he understands by adequate and inadequate cause: "I call that cause adequate

whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it. But I call it partial, *or* inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone." (E3d1) After this, he defines activity as follows:

> I say that we act [*agere*] when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, i.e. (by d1), when something in us or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone.
>
> (E3d2)

So, hardly surprisingly, action is a causally potent notion; in Spinoza's technical usage, a thing is said to be active when it is the sole, complete, or total cause of an effect: a causal factor in addition to which nothing else is needed for the effect to be realized. And as it is an axiom for Spinoza that effects are known through their causes (E1a4), in such a case there is only one cause of the effect, namely the agent, on whom knowledge concerning the effect depends.

Things become complicated, though, when attention is drawn to the fact that the definition contains a crucial explicative reference to what "follows from our nature," that is, from our essence. The same phrase is, conspicuously enough, to be found also in the definition of passivity:

> On the other hand, I say that we are acted on [*pati*] when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause.
>
> (E3d2)

In other words, that something follows from a thing's nature is fundamental for *both* activity and passivity and thus a basic ingredient in any kind of causal occurrence. Here it is helpful to note that also E1p16, the pivotal proposition arguably explicating the nature of God's activity, contains a reference to what follows from the essence, "[f]rom the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes" (E1p16). The demonstration begins with the contention, "[t]his Proposition must be plain to anyone, provided he attends to the fact that the intellect infers from the given definition of any thing a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (i.e., from the very essence of the thing)" (E1p16d).

We can start unpacking these claims by observing that they presuppose a specific theory of definable essences (or natures).[1] A detailed discussion of this intricate theory and its implications is beyond the scope of this chapter, but simplifying matters slightly the basic idea can be presented as follows.[2] Each and every thing, including God, has its own particular *essence* that constitutes the thing; the essence is thoroughly intelligible,

it can be perfectly captured by a *definition*. Both the essence and the definition have a certain structure: from the definition certain *properties* can be inferred, and this expresses those things that necessarily follow from—are realized by—the essence in question. Much here is part and parcel of the philosophical landscape of Spinoza's times, but it should be noted that a specific feature of his thought strongly pushes him to think in this way, namely the conviction that geometrical objects reveal in an exemplary fashion the inner structure of things. He famously states that an infinity of things follow from God's essence "by the same necessity and in the same way" (E1p17s) as from the essence of a triangle follows the property of having internal angles summing to two right angles. Regardless of how much of this is for us immediately transparent, there is one certain conclusion for us to draw: each and every true Spinozistic thing is *causally efficacious by virtue of its essence*. This is confirmed by such later claims as "[n]othing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow" (E1p36).[3]

It may thus be said that we act in the same sense as God does when an effect follows by necessity from our nature *alone*, that is, when we have power to bring about that effect with no contribution from other causes. This is the basic meaning of acting. Moreover, while E3d2 reveals that also patients contribute to the causal process in which they are involved, Spinoza still thinks it makes sense to talk about the active and passive aspects of a causal phenomenon. Thus, I believe it is safe to preliminarily outline the basic idea of the definition to be as follows: in action, the effect is brought about by the essence of one thing alone, whereas passions involve the essential efficacy of more than one thing.

2. Contextualizing the Definition

To understand Spinoza's definition of activity and passivity, it is helpful to take a look at what Descartes and Hobbes, his immediate predecessors, and Aristotelian scholastics, the bearers of the traditionally dominant philosophical outlook, say about the topic. Of course, many other contexts could be suggested; but I hope to show that the ones I have chosen are particularly apt to throw light on how Spinoza thinks about the issue.

Descartes famously asserts in the very first article of *The Passions of the Soul* that:

> [W]hatever takes place or occurs is generally called by philosophers a "passion" with regard to the subject to which it happens and an "action" with regard to that which makes it happen. Thus, although an agent and patient are often quite different, an action and passion must always be a single thing which has these two names on account of the two different subjects to which it may be related.
>
> (CSM I, 328)

So the agent and the patient do not have to be different things but usually are,[4] in which case we are dealing with a phenomenon that has both an active and a passive aspect.[5] Hobbes proceeds along similar lines:

> A BODY is said to work upon or act, that is to say, do something to another body, when it either generates or destroys some accident in it: and the body in which an accident is generated or destroyed is said to suffer, that is, to have something done to it by another body; as when one body by putting forwards another body generates motion in it, it is called the AGENT; and the body in which motion is so generated, is called the PATIENT; so fire that warms the hand is the agent, and the hand, which is warmed, is the patient. That accident, which is generated in the patient, is called the EFFECT.
>
> (DCo II.9.1)

So what we have is a production or destruction of *an accident* as *the effect* of the interaction between two or more causally efficacious things—the agent(s) and the patient; the thing in which the accident is generated (and hence in which the accident inheres) is passive; the other thing(s) involved is active.[6] Moreover, Hobbes (DCo II.9.3) seems to disregard the possibility that the agent and the patient could be the one and same thing.

Already a quick look reveals that Spinoza's definition differs from the ones just cited in its reference to *natures* of things as the sources of activity and passivity—it seems that Descartes and Hobbes are not committed, at least as far as their understanding of activity and passivity is concerned, to anything like the essentialism to which Spinoza is so eager to refer. Because of this and despite the fact that Spinoza's essentialism in many notable ways differs from the traditionally dominant Peripatetic essentialism, it is worthwhile to relate his conception of action and passion to the one developed by Aristotelian scholastics.

The following general formulation offers a useful initial approximation of the scholastic position: *when a substance acts upon another substance to bring about a certain state of affairs, it is active (an agent), the substance acted upon passive (patient)*.[7] However, the metaphysical grounding of activity and passivity is a thorny issue, with different scholastic authors defending (more or less) differing positions. It is nevertheless clear that hylomorphism (according to which substances are composites of substantial form and prime matter) and the teleological framework (with its distinction between potentiality and actuality) underpin all of the Aristotelian-scholastic theories, however much may they differ in details. It is safe to say that, within the Peripatetic framework, passivity pertains to the matter side of the hylomorphic composite, whereas activity pertains to form.[8] Now prime matter is completely passive; as one medieval thinker puts it, prime matter can be said to possess *infinite passivity*, for it can take up any form.[9] This is in keeping with Aristotle, who

states that "matter is potentiality, form actuality" (*De anima* 412a9–10; CWA I, 656); and since "actuality is the action" (*Metaphysics* 1050a22; CWA II, 1658), the role of (substantial) forms can be characterized as follows: "[S]ubstantial forms are the primary agents in the sublunary natural world. They both determine the superficial appearance of things, and account for a thing's unity and persistence." (Pasnau 2011, 564) Indeed, substantial forms are those principles of action by virtue of which things behave and change the way they characteristically do.[10] Acting equals realizing the form, and doing this leads eventually to the actualization of the *telos*. Since form is a constituent of a thing's essence it can be said that, for Aristotelians, action is essence-originating behavior.

With regard to passivity, the following passage is important: while discussing different kinds of potentiality, Aristotle remarks that "one kind is a potentiality for being acted on, i.e. *the principle in the very thing acted on, which makes it capable of being changed and acted on* by another thing or by itself regarded as other" (*Metaphysics* 1046a11–13; CWA I, 1651, emphasis added). Susan James captures this very well by stating that "things are passive in so far as they have the potentiality to be changed by other things for better or worse, and in all cases this potentiality is both *made possible* and *limited by* what Aristotle calls *the principle of the thing* in question" (James 1997, 33).[11] Now, what is here meant by the "principle of the thing" is not altogether clear, but, obviously, it has to do with something intrinsic to the thing in question. Thus, also passivity involves the hylomorphically conceived essence or at least something that necessarily belongs to the thing in virtue of that essence.

For our purposes the important point to be extracted from this examination is that, whatever their exact nature may be, the Aristotelian conception of action and passion is essentialist in character: whether we are considering an agent or a patient, explaining behavior requires reference to the essential principles. Accordingly, despite his antiteleological tendencies, Spinoza's essentialist conception of action and passion seems to be in this respect closer than those of Descartes and Hobbes to the Peripatetic view of activity and passivity. However, I hope to have shown that Spinoza has reasons of his own, stemming from his model of causation, to include the reference to natures in E3d2. I believe it is correct to say that Spinoza attempts to present a novel form of essentialism, one purged of teleology, and that this can also be seen in the way he defines activity and passivity.

3. The Problem of Activity

3.1 The Puzzling Definition

Given the centrality of E3d2, it is no surprise that it has received its fair share of attention. We can begin our examination by considering Michael

Della Rocca's claim that a cause can come "to be able to be active to a greater degree with regard to a certain effect,"[12] which implies that there can be less-than-complete causes that are nevertheless active and whose degree of activity can vary over time. Although this view is, in itself, quite plausible, it is uncertain whether Spinoza would be ready to endorse it. He seems to be thrust toward a position according to which the criterion of action and activity is being the entire cause of an effect: if a given effect *e* does not follow from *x*'s essence alone, then *e* does not qualify to be *x*'s action at all. This is most probably the reason why Spinoza nowhere explicitly refers to things' less-than-complete degrees of activity *with regard to a certain effect*.

Most importantly, the aforesaid signals an acute problem pertaining to Spinoza's doctrine of causation: the criterion of activity he formulates seems to be far too strict, for it leaves us with the following problem. In cases in which *x* causes a passion in *y*, for instance when a tennis player hits the tennis ball, the effect, namely the ball's movement (which is the ball's passion), is *a joint product* of the player and the ball, and cannot therefore count as an *action* of the player. This implies that in this kind of situations the cause which we would be strongly inclined to regard as the agent does not, at least *prima facie*, meet Spinoza's requirements of agency. And this means that although, for instance in the tennis example, Spinoza's definition of passivity captures quite well the situation of the ball, it is hard to know what to say about the player. It is simply counter-intuitive to classify her, too, as a patient; in fact and accordingly, it seems that Spinoza disqualifies her from being one by the "when something happens *in us*" clause of the definition of passivity, since the effect does not inhere in her. But then again, as the effect (the ball's motion) is not caused by the player's essence alone, she does not meet the requirement Spinoza sets for the agent, either. Martha Kneale has noticed what I think is the source of this problem and formulates it as follows:

> One surprising proposition is involved in Definition II, namely, that something can happen outside a given mode which can be clearly and distinctly understood in terms of the nature of that mode alone. This is surprising because the general doctrine of Part II of the *Ethics* seems to imply that any transaction involving two or more modes can be fully understood only in terms of the nature of all of them.[13]

Although this passage dates already from the 1970s, no-one, to my knowledge, has explicitly attempted to give an answer to Kneale. Paul Hoffman has more recently noted the same issue, although without referring to Kneale, and frames it very well:

> For us to act on something outside us entails that something which happens outside us can be clearly and distinctly understood through

> our nature alone, but that would seem to be impossible, since something happens outside us only if something else is at least a partial cause of it. But it seems paradoxical to say, what Spinoza's definitions of action and passion seem to entail, that we never act on anything else, but instead always undergo something, when we are the partial cause of something outside us.[14]

This makes us face what I would call the activity puzzle: how can we be the adequate cause of an effect outside us?

The problem at hand is not a minor one, for it seems to plague *every* case of intermodificationary causation, or transeunt causation taking place between finite modes (for instance when a moving billiard ball hits another ball at rest, causing it to move); in other words, only intramodificationary (or immanent) causation, that is, when a finite *x* produces an effect *in itself*, seems with certainty to count as a Spinozistic action, for then the effect results from *x*'s essence alone. I presume the paradigmatic instance of this would be mental action, for instance forming an idea of the essence of a geometrical figure in one's mind and deriving other ideas from that idea, namely ideas of those properties that necessarily follow from the figure's nature.

3.2 Previous Attempts to Solve the Problem

One rather obvious way of trying to solve this problem is to accept that only partial causes are to be found in any intermodificationary causal occurrence but that it is still possible to identify certain partial causes as agents, others as patients. Actually, Della Rocca's talk about "the greater degree" of activity with regard to a given effect points to this direction: it implies that *x* can be both (1) a partial cause of *e* and (2) active with regard to *e*, that is, that activity and partiality do not exclude each other. So maybe Spinoza's idea can be interpreted to be as follows. Given that he says that we "act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause" (E3d2), in transeunt causation the "something" being adequately caused cannot be the total effect (e.g. the tennis ball's motion) but only the *aspect* of the effect that follows from the agent's nature alone (e.g. the impact given to the ball by the tennis player, transferring a certain magnitude of kinetic energy to the ball). This makes sense, but leaves us with the question of how—since neither one of the causal *relata* is the complete cause of the total effect—can we identify the agent side and the patient side of the causal occurrence?

Here it is helpful to consider the context formed by Spinoza's most immediate predecessors. The answer they would give to this question is, I think, clear: both Descartes and Hobbes emphasize that a causal occurrence is a whole involving both an agent and a patient, and the patient is *the one in which the effect takes place or inheres*. This is evinced by

Descartes's contention that an occurrence is "a 'passion' with regard to the subject *to which it happens* and an 'action' with regard to that which makes it happen" (CSM I, 328, emphasis added),[15] and by Hobbes's assertion that "when one body by putting forwards another body generates motion in it, it is called the AGENT; and the body *in which* motion is so generated, is called the PATIENT [. . .][.] That accident, *which is generated in the patient*, is called the EFFECT" (DCo II.9.1, emphases added).

Could Spinoza's definition of activity and passivity be interpreted in a similar fashion? Would it be consistent with his definition to hold that in transeunt causation all causal *relata* are only partial causes, but the patient is marked off by being the *relatum* whose state is being altered; all other *relata* are agents? Now the trouble is that if E3d2 is taken as it stands, it is not evident that the answer to this question can be affirmative: in the solution just proposed, also the thing in which the newly produced state inheres can be said to cause *adequately* a certain aspect of the causing (e.g. from the tennis ball's nature it follows that it has a certain kind of elastic structure, for its part responsible for the motion the ball acquires after having been hit by the player),[16] and this means that since Spinoza allows that the effect adequately brought about by the agent can happen not only outside but also *in it*, also the thing in which the state inheres would qualify as a Spinozistic *agent* with regard to the component of the total effect it produces. This in a sense short-circuits Spinoza's definition and leaves us with no unambiguous way of distinguishing agents from patients.

There is another kind of solution offered by Hoffman. It runs as follows:

> [S]omething's following from my nature alone is not, on Spinoza's view, incompatible with its following solely from the nature of some external thing that affects me. Insofar as an external thing affects me through some property I have in common with it (and that property need not even be a common property, that is, a property that is equally in the part and in the whole) something happens in me which follows from my nature alone, but it also follows from the nature of the external thing. Thus although the external thing is acting on me, I am also acting, not undergoing something. So acting is not necessarily contrasted with being affected by something external; it is contrasted only with undergoing, and undergoing involves being affected by (or affecting) something external *through a property that the things do not have in common*.[17]

Now it is undeniable that the *relata* of transeunt causation must have something in common in order to enter into causal relation with each other; at the very least, they must be things of the same attribute (E4p29d).[18] And it is true that according to Spinoza, causal occurrences can be depicted in terms of agreements and disagreements: when something acts

on us through what it has in common with us, it agrees with us and can only produce joy in us (E4p30—p31); whereas people torn by passions can disagree with and thereby be contrary to each other, which gives rise to sadness (E4p33—p34). However, as far as I know, Spinoza nowhere uses these ideas in a way that would address, even in passing, the distinction between activity and passivity. Moreover, as Hoffman admits, it is an implication of his position that when *x* affects *y* through a property they do not have in common, *x* also *undergoes* something. But this surely sounds strange: whenever *x* affects *y*—regardless of how this happens—I take it that we would understand the verb "to affect" in such a way that we would want to say that *x* is the agent, *y* the patient.[19] Due to these troubles, I think we should look further still for an interpretation of Spinoza's notion of activity.

3.3 The Definition Newly Explicated

To my mind, the source of the difficulties thus far encountered is that Spinoza fails to make his definition complex enough to accommodate both immanent and transeunt causation. It is as if he simply used his understanding of God's causality to define activity, just adding the additional "outside us" remark. But as such claims as E1p18 make clear, Spinoza's model of causation is, in fact, an account of one kind of *immanent* causation, and, as the problems just encountered indicate, as such it cannot be used for defining intermodificationary causation, which is one kind of *transeunt* causation, without a considerable amount of revision work.

I do, however, think that Spinoza can be interpreted as trying to articulate in E3d2 the following rather understandable line of thought concerning activity. First, in immanent modal causation, that is, when a finite thing brings about something in itself, it is the adequate, or entire, cause of the effect and hence necessarily active; no patient is involved. Second, in transeunt modal causation, that is, in causation taking place between finite modifications, all causal *relata* contribute adequately to a certain aspect of the resultant total effect, and the *relatum* in which the effect inheres can be called the patient, others agents.

This reading takes it for granted that the distinction between activity and passivity is exhaustive, that is, that each and every cause must fall into either category. However, it may be claimed that perhaps Spinoza does not regard the distinction as such, and hence it is not a problem that he does not tell us what we should call a thing that is in a causal process (1) a partial cause (and hence not active) but nevertheless (2) not the bearer of the effect (and hence very uneasily classified as passive). Moreover, this lacuna could be regarded as unimportant, for instance because in cases in which several things together bring about something it is not always easy to say whether or not they should count as agents (for

instance, when a vast number of people stand on a bridge and thereby make it collapse),[20] or because these kind of cases are not at the core of the moral life celebrated in the *Ethics*. In other words, the status of cases in which we accomplish something together with other causes (for instance, when a tennis player learns to hit the ball hard and accurately) is unclear; it might be justified to see them as insignificant for Spinozistic ethics, ultimately very much focused on intellectual activity.

However, mainly because Spinoza's predecessors do not even hint that there could be room for causes that are neither active nor passive and hence seem to regard the distinction as exhaustive, it seems simply too big a leap to claim that Spinoza entertains—without anywhere explicitly confessing to do so—the idea that there are non-passive but still partial causes that fall somewhere in between agents and patients. After all, Descartes states in no uncertain terms: "[W]hatever is not an action is a passion." (CSMK, 270) Further, an opponent of the exhaustive reading should still spell out Spinoza's reasons for including the "outside us" passage in the definition of action, which does not seem to be an easy task, for anything taking place outside a supposedly active thing seems to inevitably involve causal factors other than the thing's nature, hence debarring it from being an agent in the proper Spinozistic sense. Moreover, the "in us or outside us" passage could be interpreted as referring to both immanent ("in us") and transeunt ("outside us") causation, and if this is what Spinoza has in mind, it at least suggests that E3d2 is supposed to cover all kinds of causal relations.

To summarize, solving the activity puzzle requires elaborating the activity—passivity distinction in a way that is fine-grained enough to take into account the profound difference between immanent and transeunt causation. Although this is not the most parsimonious interpretative path to take and makes defining activity and passivity a relatively complex affair, I believe that it not only captures quite well what Spinoza is attempting to say but also gives him conceptual resources to distinguish between agents and patients in instances of transeunt causation (such as the one depicted by the tennis example). So, in immanent causation the effect is brought about by the agent's power alone; in transeunt causation, both the agent and the patient are causally efficacious, and the resulting effect inheres in the latter.[21] I think that Spinoza's failure to give an adequate formulation to his thoughts could well stem from his strong commitment to the monistic framework: as far as God's causality and activity are concerned, the perplexities plaguing finite causation simply do not come up. In fact, given Spinoza's general metaphysical outlook, it seems he should be constantly reminding us that causation can be adequately conceived only from the monistic viewpoint according to which all talk of transeunt finite causation should be, as it were, translated into talk of God's immanent causation—our outside is, after all, God's inside.

4. The Problem of Passivity

4.1 The Puzzling Definition

We have seen that Spinoza endorses an essentialist view of causality in which essences operate as centers of causal efficacy: effects follow from the natures of things, as their properties.[22] Spinoza refers to this also when defining passivity; recall: "I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or *something follows from our nature*, of which we are only a partial cause" (E3d2, emphasis added). However, this gives rise to the following conundrum. It would seem that if something follows from our nature, then we are its complete, or only, cause. But this would go against the very idea of passivity as something that always involves at least two things, the agent and the patient—which is arguably why Spinoza thinks that the reference to being "only a partial cause" is in order. The problem is thus: how can passions both follow from our nature and be only partially caused by us?[23]

Here it may be pointed out that Spinoza says that when an action follows from our nature, it can be understood through that nature *alone* (E3d2), but he does not say the same of passions. However, this only pushes the problem one step further: if something follows from our nature, as any passion does, how could it not be adequately understood through that nature alone?

The key to answering the aforementioned questions lies in finding out how something can follow from our nature so that adequate cognition of it requires understanding not only our nature but something else, namely the external cause, as well. Here it is singularly helpful to turn to what may be called Spinoza's theory of constitution,[24] according to which one and the same essence can be, and in fact is, differently constituted, as the causal context varies: "[A]s each [man] is affected by external causes with this or that species of Joy, Sadness, Love, Hate, etc.—i.e., *as his nature is constituted in one way or the other*, so his Desires vary" (E3p56d, emphasis added). "[B]y an affection of the human essence we understand any constitution of that essence, whether it is innate [NS: or has come from outside]" (E3defaff1exp). These passages explicate being affected by external causes (i.e. being passive) *in terms of* one's nature or essence *changing its constitution*. When an external cause affects us without destroying us, it does not alter our essence (that would equal our destruction (E4pr)), only (re)determines its constitution. Now understanding *how* a new constitution comes about requires cognition not only of our own nature but also the nature of the external cause(s),[25] but once an essence is constituted in a specific way, certain properties as effects necessarily follow from it. This can be illustrated geometrically. There are many different kinds of triangles: equilateral, isosceles, right-angled, scalene, etc. Now each of these can be conceived of as the triangle constituted in

a certain way: equilaterally, isosceles-wise, right-anglely, scalenely. Let us take a triangle constituted equilaterally: from its essence necessarily follows the property of equiangularity—there cannot be an equilateral triangle without this property. Now if we change the triangle's constitution to a right-angled one, the property of equiangularity does not follow from its nature; instead we have the property of fulfilling the Pythagorean theorem (which in turn does not follow from the nature of the equilateral triangle).

The aforesaid indicates that Spinoza's theory of the passions is built on the idea that external causes act on us *by determining the constitution of our essence*. To understand a passion we need to understand the external cause and our nature,[26] and from the latter as determined by the former the passion follows. This is what he means, I would argue, by saying that the basic kinds of passive emotions or affects—desires, joys, and sadnesses—arise from certain external causes: "We say that we are acted on when something arises [*oritur*] in us of which we are only the partial cause (by 3d2), that is (by 3d1), something which cannot be deduced from the laws of our nature alone" (E4p2). That Spinoza really has the geometry-inspired essence–property structure in view when he analyzes the emotions is confirmed in a late scholium of the fourth part of the *Ethics*, which offers a valuable elaboration of the mission statement of E3pr, of considering emotions "just like other natural things": the aim is "to demonstrate the nature and properties of things," and the things he says to follow from the affect of pride he has just discussed follow from it "as necessarily as it follows from the nature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles" (E4p57s). Consistently enough, the same model also applies to *emotions themselves* as properties endowed with their essences from which different effects follow as the causal context varies: "[F]rom the same property of human nature from which it follows that men are compassionate, it also follows that the same men are envious and ambitious" (E3p32s).

In Spinoza's analyses of passive emotions, external causes as proximate causes figure prominently,[27] which is in keeping with the methodological strictures set already in the early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TIE). The first criterion of a good definition is that it should "include the proximate cause" (TIE § 96; C I, 39) by which the defined thing is produced. Spinoza thinks, quite traditionally, that to understand something is to know its causes, or the way in which it is generated. The other criterion of a good definition is that "all the thing's properties can be deduced from it" (TIE § 96; C I, 40). Accordingly, an adequate definition of a specific emotion must state (1) the external cause as the proximate cause that determines the constitution of our essence and (2) the emotion that follows as the property of that essence. This explains why Spinoza defines passivity the way he does: even though a passion follows from a determinately constituted essence, it cannot be adequately understood

through that essence alone; for that, knowledge of the determining proximate cause is required as well.

4.2 The Nature of Passive Emotions

The present interpretation of passivity invites us to reconsider Spinoza's understanding of passive emotions. We have thus far been focusing on causes, essences, and properties. However, the issue could also be framed in dynamic terms: as God's modifications all finite things express God's power, which makes them intrinsically powerful strivers (E3p6–p7). In this framework, the agent can be said to determine the intrinsic power of the patient so that that power is exercised in a certain way. To the extent that this intrinsic power of ours is not hindered, it is what Spinoza calls *power of acting*.[28]

Spinoza acknowledges that passive emotions are not necessarily harmful: they can be both negative and positive, emotions of sadness and of joy.[29] Andrea Sangiacomo has claimed that my account, by stressing the geometrical model and the essentialism it involves the way it does, is vulnerable to the following criticism: "[S]hould power of acting consist in nothing but bringing about what follows from our essence alone, Spinoza would not be entitled to claim that external causes can *increase* our power of acting by determining our nature. From this point of view, in fact, 'joyful passions' [. . .] would be inconceivable."[30] Indeed, Sangiacomo seems to think that I and Don Garrett conceive of external causes "only as a possible threat, at best, for activity."[31] But as Sangiacomo correctly points out, this cannot be the case, since Spinoza often talks about passions having a positive effect on our power of acting. So how can the thus far presented interpretation account for the nature of passive emotions, especially joyful ones, external causes give rise to in us?

The notion of power of acting is connected to the idea of being completely active: to the completely unimpeded use of our intrinsic power so that we are totally self-determined, only cause effects that can be understood through our nature alone. For us limited beings, this is something unreachable, for "[i]t is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause" (E4p4). Given that we can be active but never completely so, it is all a matter of degree here: at any given moment, many things follow from our nature, and to the extent that following is to be understood through our nature alone, we are active and self-determined. However, given that we are deeply connected to the causal network of the universe, it seems evident that, at least usually, most things we do and feel are passions, determined by the interaction between our nature and the nature of the external causes affecting us.

According to the present geometry-inspired model the nature of passive emotions is to be understood as follows. Let us assume that being constituted equilaterally is what a triangle would be in a state of complete self-determination. Next, think of the triangle being constituted scalenely, which is a state far removed from the self-determined one. Should there be an external cause that determines it to a right-angled constitution, the triangle would reach a state in which it is more self-determined than before; consequently, that transition, should the triangle be capable of emotions, would give rise to the passion of joy. The triangle is still not completely self-determined: for instance, it still does not have the property of equiangularity. When things are taken to the reverse direction so that constitutions further removed from the self-determined one result, humans (and other sentient creatures)[32] undergo passions of sadness. Triangles are *entia rationis*,[33] and as such without causal power,[34] but for *real* Spinozistic things the aforesaid can be expressed in dynamic terms as follows. External causes determine the extent to which the intrinsic power of things is exerted passively or actively; they can increase things' power of acting by determining them to be closer to the constitution in which they would be completely active and self-determined. In such a case, the powers of things can certainly be said to be combined;[35] it is an overarching contention of Spinoza's moral psychology that a definite dynamics determines the character of our emotional lives. But we should not forget that *whether* things are useful or harmful to, or agree or disagree with, each other depends on the constitution of their natures,[36] and *what* exactly the thing determined brings about with its power is ultimately fixed by its essence—constitution—property structure.[37] This makes, for Spinoza, his essentialism in at least one important respect more explanatory than his dynamism (i.e. the view that things are essentially dynamic entities interacting with each other).

The aforesaid has remained at a very abstract level and raises the question, how does the fundamental constitutional architecture of emotional dynamics appear on the phenomenological level? In the third and fourth parts of the *Ethics*, Spinoza's analysis of passive emotions operates within what may be termed the familiar parallelist framework in which increases or decreases in our power of acting are explicated both in mental and physical terms. He himself gives the following example that illustrates particularly well the way in which differing constitutions underpin our perfectly quotidian psychophysical operations:

> For example, when we imagine something which usually pleases us by its taste, we desire to enjoy it—that is, to consume it. But while we thus enjoy it, the stomach is filled, and the body constituted differently. So if (while the body is now differently disposed) the presence of the food or drink encourages the image of it, and consequently also the striving, *or* desire to consume it, then that new constitution

> will be opposed to this desire, *or* striving. Hence, the presence of the food or drink we used to want will be hateful. This is what we call *disgust* and *weariness*.
>
> (E3p59s)

In cases like this, the essence of our mind and body does not change, it is just constituted anew, with the corresponding disposition of the body, imaginative ideas of the mind, and such emotions as an appetite, or a disgust, for food and drink.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, I hope to have established that the puzzle concerning Spinoza's definition of activity can be solved by taking into account its historical context and by making explicit what is left implicit in the E3d2, namely the distinction between immanent and transeunt causation. The source of the difficulties lies, I have suggested, in Spinoza's monistic mindset to which transeunt causation is in a sense more foreign than immanent causation. As for Spinoza's definition of passivity, I have argued that it turns out to be quite understandable if we acknowledge that external causes cause can, and most often do, (re)determine the constitution of our essence, from which essence passions then necessarily follow even though adequate knowledge of those passions require knowledge not only of our essence but also of external things as proximate causes. According to this geometry-inspired theory of emotions, the basic causal architecture of such quotidian feelings as hunger, thirst, anger, and gratitude is formed by transitions from one constitution to another.[38]

Notes

1 As far as I can see, Spinoza uses the notions of essence and nature interchangeably. For the view that the same does not apply to Descartes, see Deborah Brown's contribution to this volume.
2 For my detailed account of the theory, see Viljanen 2011, 8–21, 44–46.
3 I defend a specific interpretation of this claim in Viljanen 2011, chs. 2–3 and label Spinoza's view *dynamic essentialism* (*ibid*., 73–82). However, it should be noted that in its general outlines, the position I endorse is nowadays widespread in scholarship; see e.g. Garrett 2002, 150; Lin 2006, 343.
4 Descartes of the *Passions*, of course, states that there are also pure mental actions, namely volitions "which terminate in the soul itself" (CSM I, 335). This kind of volitions do not involve a patient.
5 On action and passion in Descartes, see also Brown's contribution to this volume.
6 In other words, the activity of *x* and the passivity of *y*—both evidently representing different types of causal efficacy, namely active and passive power—together result in the accident as the effect. So the accident is certainly one thing, but activity and passivity pertain to different entities. As we will see below, Spinoza views what is called transeunt causation rather similarly.

7 Here I am following Alfred Freddoso: "Typically, substances (agents) act upon other substances (patients) to bring about or actualize or produce states of affairs (effects)" (Freddoso 1988, 79).
8 Cf. e.g. Des Chene 1996, 161–62.
9 The thinker in question is Albert of Saxony (Pasnau 2011, 40).
10 See, e.g., Lear 1988, 33; Des Chene 1996, 65–66; Ariew and Gabbey 1998, 429–31; Pasnau 2011, 561–63.
11 Emphases added. See also Ariew and Gabbey 1998, 430.
12 Della Rocca 1996, 211. Charlie Huenemann seems to agree: "[W]e can parcel out the portions of its [the body's] behavior that are due to the body's own powers, and speak of *the extent to which* a body's behavior is self-determined" (Huenemann 2008, 102).
13 Kneale 1976, 217.
14 Hoffman 1991, 178.
15 See, however, note 4 in this chapter.
16 For a similar line of thought, see Rice 1992.
17 Hoffman 1991, 178–79.
18 Thereby Spinoza avoids the main problem plaguing Descartes's interactionism.
19 Here we would have the Western tradition on our side, as Plato's Eleatic Stranger quoted in the beginning of this chapter testifies.
20 I owe this example to Koistinen. However, it seems to me that there is no shortage of cases (such as a group of people lifting a heavy object together) in which it is quite natural to identify some of the causal factors involved as active, others as passive.
21 Again, it should be recalled that the same distinction, although not stated explicitly, forms part of the Cartesian framework; see note 4 in this chapter.
22 Cf.: "[E]ffect, *or* property" (E3defaff22exp).
23 To my knowledge, there is no discussion in the literature of this problem, perhaps simply because until fairly recently not much attention has been given to Spinoza's essentialist understanding of causation.
24 For my earlier exposition of this theory, see Viljanen 2011, 151–57.
25 As E3p56d explains, "the nature of each passion must necessarily be so explained that the nature of the object by which we are affected is expressed."
26 It should be noted that external causes are causally efficacious through their essences, the constitution of the patient being the joint product of the patient's essence and the external cause(s) essence(s).
27 Since Spinoza assumes the human nature—like any nature—as such to be unchangeable, it is understandable that his catalogue of the passions is structured around the different kind of proximate causes, or external causes that affect us: "There are as many species of joy, sadness, and desire, and consequently of each affect composed of these [. . .] or derived from them (like love, hate, hope, fear, etc.), as there are species of objects by which we are affected" (E3p56).
28 For a detailed discussion of this, see Viljanen 2011, 77–82.
29 Moreover, we should not forget that there are also active emotions, which can only be joyful.
30 Sangiacomo 2015, 532n29.
31 Sangiacomo 2015, 539. Sangiacomo refers to Garrett 2002; Viljanen 2011, 125–32.
32 See E3p57s.
33 See letter 83 (C II, 487).
34 For more on this, see Viljanen 2011, 62n31.

35 This is something Sangiacomo 2015 emphasizes; see, e.g., E4p18s.
36 This, as I see it, is the force of E4p30–p35: humans often disagree with each other despite the fact that in themselves (as constituted rationally) their natures necessarily agree.
37 Here I agree with Justin Steinberg, although he puts his point in terms different from mine: "The emotion marks a kind of structural change; the desire is the functional effect of this change" (Steinberg 2016, 75).
38 I would like to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to Juhani Pietarinen, whom I miss very much, for many helpful and inspiring discussions also on the topics of this chapter. I would also like to thank Lilli Alanen for so generously hosting me in Uppsala in 2008: some parts of this chapter hark back to that visit. Many thanks also to Olli Koistinen, Arto Repo, the Helsinki History of Philosophy Research Seminar, and the Turku Rationalist Club for constructive comments on the chapter. Special thanks to Justin Steinberg for detailed written comments, and to the editors of this volume for several insightful suggestions. Finally, I would like to acknowledge that the work on this chapter has been financially supported by the Academy of Finland (project number 275583).

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Part III

Will, Virtue, and Love

11 Teleology and Descartes' Problem of Error[1]

Tomas Ekenberg

In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes argues that all judgments involve an act of the will. On some level, our convictions, even those which amount to knowledge, are a matter of will or choice. The view to which he subscribes is often called doxastic voluntarism. Commentators have disagreed on the exact characteristics and precise scope of Descartes' doxastic voluntarism. Does Descartes believe that all beliefs are subject to direct voluntary control? Does he believe that all beliefs are subject to at least some kind of indirect voluntary control, or is the will altogether constrained somehow in the affirming of some beliefs? In this chapter, doxastic voluntarism will refer to the position Descartes uncontroversially holds, keeping open the question what in terms of autonomy or control is secured for a person by claiming that an act of her will is involved in belief formation. According to this account, again, a person's performing a cognitive judgment always involves an act of the will. But does Descartes offer us a plausible account of cognitive judgment?

I will read Descartes' doxastic-voluntarist account of judgment against the background of Augustine's discussion of the problem of evil in *De libero arbitrio*. This reading will help us see that the will and the intellect are constituents of a psychological framework that is robustly teleological. I argue that the teleological framework which Descartes shares with Augustine and the medieval tradition helps Descartes to answer two objections that are often raised in regard to doxastic voluntarism in general: According to the first, epistemological objection, introducing the will in an account of judgment risks undermining the possibility to construct a valid justificatory account of beliefs based on those judgments; according to the second, empirical objection, there seems to be ample evidence against our being able to believe any and all things at will.

Reading Descartes' discussion in the Fourth Meditation in the light of Augustine's *De libero arbitrio* helps us make sense of Descartes, but it also introduces problems. Most notably, we have to deal with Descartes' exchange about the Fourth Meditation with Arnauld in the *Objections and Replies*, and the fact that Descartes himself in the preface to

the *Meditations* appears to object to a reading of the Fourth Meditation which takes the discussion to involve any reference to morality, good, and evil. Descartes' focus on understanding the power of judgment as a teleological power that depends on the power of free will goes a long way towards explaining the remark in the preface, however.

1. Choosing to Believe

In the Fourth Meditation, as part of his project to develop the proper method to secure scientific knowledge, Descartes presents a theory of cognition that many philosophers have found either bold and striking or simply flawed and mistaken. The characteristic—and allegedly problematic—feature of this theory is the claim that belief or judgment always involves an act of the will. Descartes' invocation of the will in this context invites at least two different sets of questions and puzzles, the first set being about how to think about the epistemological contents of the Fourth Meditation, and the other set about how to think about Descartes position with respect to will, freedom, and morality.

What might be considered radical about Descartes' invocation of the will and its freedom in discussing cognitive judgments is that it seems to completely ignore the distinction between belief and desire, or between the cognitive and the conative, or perhaps between thinking and acting. For unlike Descartes, *we* may want to distinguish between, on the one hand, the world altering us—as when we perceive that the world is such and such—and, on the other, our setting out to alter the world ourselves, as when we desire that the world be different than it is. In a case where my belief amounts to knowledge and where I correctly believe for instance that the sun is up, my *choosing* to believe that the sun is up seems irrelevant at best, and possibly even highly problematic: For one thing, freely and unconstrainedly choosing to believe something seems to fly in the face of the rationality required for knowing, since it makes true belief subject to arbitrariness, to the believer's whim. From a justificatory point of view, this seems comparable to the case where true belief is the result of blind luck. There is also another objection, one which William James vividly describes, namely that everyday experience seems to tell us that belief is not to be found among the things that are up to us, that belief is simply not subject to our control in this way:

> Can we, by just willing it, believe that Abraham Lincoln's existence is a myth, and that the portraits of him in McClure's Magazine are all of some one else? Can we, by any effort of our will, or by any strength of wish that it were true, believe ourselves well and about when we are roaring with rheumatism in bed, or feel certain that the sum of the two one-dollar bills in our pocket must be a hundred dollars?
>
> (James 1896, 330)

I don't think Descartes is simply mistaken, and I do think he is able to provide good answers to these objections. But in order to make sense of Descartes' theory, we must read the argument in the Fourth Meditation charitably, which means that, among other things, we need to proceed on the supposition that we do not know at the outset the precise meaning of Descartes' words "will", "judgment", "perception", and so on. On the one hand, the meaning of these words are in part what is at issue in Descartes' *Meditations*, and on the other hand, in order to fully understand his arguments, we must take into account relevant parts of his philosophical background and context. This in turn raises questions about Descartes' relation to the tradition, and for reasons that will become clear to the Christian philosophy of Augustine and of the scholastics in particular.

There is no doubt that Descartes draws on the Christian philosophical tradition in the *Meditations* as a whole and the Fourth Meditation in particular. Commentators part ways, however, on the question as to what extent and precisely what parts of the tradition Descartes relies on, and also where he ends up doctrinally with respect to various schools and movements in that tradition, especially with respect to his views on human nature. John Carriero argues that there are close affinities between Descartes' account of cognition in the Fourth Meditation and traditional accounts of cognition found in scholasticism, perhaps especially Aquinas'. Lilli Alanen, by contrast, argues that Descartes betrays influences from the Franciscan voluntarists of the late 13th century and focuses on Descartes' view of will and free choice in making her case.[2]

No controversy should arise, however, when we claim that Descartes was influenced by Augustine. On some level, the Fourth Meditation simply reads as a Cartesian version of Augustine's treatment of the problem of evil in *De libero arbitrio*.[3] While Augustine was worried about the existence of evil and sin in a world created by an omnipotent, benevolent God, Descartes is worried about another—or rather more specific—sort of human fault or flaw, namely cognitive error. But apart from this admittedly important difference, Descartes proceeds to give what looks like more or less a faithfully Augustinian solution to the problem.

The cause or source or author of cognitive errors is not God, Descartes argues, but the human being herself. God gives to every human being a faculty of judgment by which she can attain true, scientific knowledge, but this ability or faculty can be abused, and when the human being abuses it—of her own free will—she errs. The power to judge, to form beliefs, is in itself a good thing, and it is a gift from God who is all-good. The possession of the faculty makes the possessor into a nobler creature than she would have been if she lacked it. In Descartes' terminology, the faculty itself constitutes a perfection. Only God is fully perfect. Human beings are given some perfections, but obviously not all perfections. When a human being freely abuses her God-given faculty of judgment and commits a cognitive error, then she is ridding herself of something

which she ought to possess—i.e., knowledge or an instance of knowing.[4] Here Descartes employs a distinction which Augustine relies on, and which is related to one Aristotle makes in the *Metaphysics*, namely that between privation and mere negation.[5] A privation is a negation—a lack—that constitutes a deviation from a Divine standard. In Augustine, evil and sin are not the mere negation of good, but the privation of good. And Descartes' cognitive errors are like Augustine's sins. As Descartes explains, "error is not a pure negation, i.e. not simply the defect or lack of some perfection to which I have no proper claim but rather a privation or lack of some knowledge which somehow should be in me" (CSM 2, 38; AT 7, 55).

For Descartes, error is the result of a misuse or an abuse of a god-given power or faculty and it consists in a deviation from the Divine standard. This is all very Augustinian. When we look at the Fourth Meditation, the elements seem more or less all to be there: there is the notion of privation as a negation which is a deviation from a standard, there is the notion of human being as being situated in the middle somewhere on a cosmic scale from non-being to full being or from nothingness up to God, there is the notion of *liberum arbitrium* or the will playing the lead role and so on.

But clearly there is also something un-Augustinian about the Fourth Meditation. The problem of evil, so central not only to Augustine's discussion in the *De libero arbitrio*, but by Augustine's own admission to his life and intellectual journey as a whole, seems curiously *secondary* in Descartes' treatment. As John Carriero has pointed out, Descartes has selected the subtitle "Of Truth and Falsity", which indicates a different focus than Augustine's in the *De libero arbitrio*. Descartes' worry is not so much the presence of bad judgments in the world and with how to square this fact with the existence of a good God (Carriero 2009, 223). Rather the worry is still roughly that of the First Meditation, where he sets out to reject as false all the things he believes in order to find solid ground for establishing certainty and real, unshakable knowledge. When we get to the Fourth Meditation, that foundation is already almost in place thanks to job done in the Third Meditation; the proof of the existence of God as a perfect being and the validity or possible validity of the "truth rule", which says that whatever the Meditator perceives clearly and distinctly is true.[6] What remains to be done is to establish the truth rule decisively by showing that both the rule and God's goodness are indeed compatible with error. The results from this argument then help Descartes to turn the truth rule into a method for expanding knowledge beyond its foundation to cover more things, and material objects in particular. Here Descartes project looks very different from Augustine's.

However, I think it is wrong to conclude that Descartes somehow merely (ab)uses Augustine's strategies to help him develop a theory that has little to do with Augustine's original worries and conclusions. I think the most direct way to make this clearer is to remind ourselves that we

are still dealing with the will and with doxastic voluntarism. We should follow Lilli Alanen in examining Descartes' preoccupation with the will, and with freedom of choice or *liberum arbitrium*. I think once we focus on the things that Descartes says about the will and free choice, and our responsibility for errors, we see that Descartes relies on Augustinian assumptions about human nature and action, and is best read as belonging to a tradition that stretches from Augustine and Boethius, through Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Tomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus, and many others. What I will do next, is to try and read Descartes' analysis of error from an Augustinian point of view, and then try and to identify and describe very roughly the main problems and merits of this reading.

2. Error as a Problem

In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes explains that error in judgment depends on two concurrent causes, the faculty of knowledge or intellect, and the faculty of choice or freedom of the will (CSM 2, 39; AT 7, 56). The intellect enables him to perceive ideas but this perceiving involves no affirmation or negation, and so at this stage there is no truth or falsity and no possibility of error. But he can also make judgments. He can affirm or deny whatever is suggested in the idea, and this is where error may arise. The affirmations and denials are wholly up to himself and the result of a free decision according to Descartes.

Error is made possible by the fact that since the will is completely free the person can affirm or deny an idea which is *not* clear and distinct (CSM 2, 40–41; AT 7, 58–60). But when the person does this, she makes a mistake:

> The cause of error must surely be the one I have explained; for if, whenever I have to make a judgement, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong.
>
> (CSM 2, 43; AT 7, 62)

The error is not strictly speaking an error of the intellect. The mere lack of a clear and distinct idea is not a privation. It is not the lack of something which *ought* to be. In Augustinian terminology, this intellectual imperfection—ignorance—is a mere negation. Error, by contrast, "is not a pure negation, but rather a privation or lack of some knowledge which somehow should be in me" (CSM 2, 38; AT 7, 55). Furthermore, error requires a full judgment, not mere perception, and so error requires the will. Only when the will is involved, abuse of a god-given faculty may occur, because unlike mere perception, a judgment is something we make, something we do. It is an action. Since the lack of properly affirmed clear

and distinct ideas is our own doing, we have in a sense robbed ourselves of knowledge. Descartes' distinction between ignorance and error thus neatly lines up with the Augustinian distinction between mere negation and privation, where privation is sin whereas negation is mere creaturely imperfection.

Saying that Descartes' account of error lines up with Augustine's distinction, however, appears however tantamount to saying that error is a form of sin. Given Descartes' analysis of mere *ignorance* as the passive reception of ideas without commitment to either truth or falsity, *ignorance* is mere negation and not evil. Error, by contrast, is self-inflicted privation, and so will indeed be evil and a sin from this Augustinian point of view.

In insisting that judgments depend on the will, Descartes is placing judgment within the realm of action and morality. And accordingly, we find in the text a methodological principle which looks a rule of conduct, or as an ethics of judgment of sorts: "If . . . I simply refrain from making a judgment in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity or distinctness, then it is clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error" (CSM 2, 41; AT 7, 59).[7]

3. Error and Sin

There is of course an obvious objection to reading the discussion of the will in the Fourth Meditation as involving reference to an account of human action and of human imperfection and morality. The objection is this. In the preface to the *Meditations*, Descartes seems to explicitly dissuade us from this reading:

> [I]t should be noted in passing that I do not deal at all with sin, i.e. the error which is committed in pursuing good and evil, but only the error that occurs in distinguishing truth from falsehood. And there is no discussion of matters pertaining to faith or the conduct of life, but simply of speculative truths which are known solely by means of the natural light.
>
> (CSM 2, 11; AT 7, 15)

Now, this is admittedly a serious problem for the interpretation we are considering here. We were trying to read Descartes' discussion in Fourth Meditation as a discussion of the will and human action and rules of conduct and therefore of morality, and Descartes more or less explicitly says we are wrong to understand it this way. It seems we could not ask for better textual evidence *against* our reading.

Taking Descartes' remarks at face value, I believe we are forced into what looks like a dilemma, or at least what William James would call a forced option. Any interpreter will have to choose sides here, and with

respect to using Augustine to sort out the arguments of Fourth Meditation there are basically only two alternatives. The first option is that we stick to our guns: that we retain the assumption that the Fourth Meditation is indeed about God's goodness, about human imperfection, sin, and freedom of the will. If we do this, we will have to account for or mitigate or explain away the very troublesome remarks in the preface. Descartes' remarks in the preface are made in response to Arnauld's discussion in the fourth set of objections, and so we need to provide a satisfactory reading of this latter interchange.

The second option is that we instead give up the assumption that what Descartes is presenting in the Fourth Meditation is anything like a traditional discussion of freedom and evil. Whatever Descartes says about human imperfection, these things are on this reading at most *indirectly* pertinent to morality, and when Descartes talks about freedom of the will, we need to make a distinction: what is at issue is a purely *cognitive* freedom of the will, which is to be distinguished from that *moral* freedom of the will attributed to human beings by Christian philosophers with very few exceptions from antiquity onwards.

In other words, we have the option either to find some way of dealing with Descartes' response to Arnauld over faith and morality, or we have to find a way to read Fourth Meditation where it doesn't involve a proper "theodicy", and where Descartes does not invite questions about the relation between human beings and God with respect to moral action and the existence of evil. Both these two options look grim indeed. But the second looks hopeless.

I think this much is clear. When Descartes talks about human free will, Descartes is talking about human action. And when he is talking about rules or principles that apply when human beings act, he is talking about practical—and therefore moral—rules or principles. In the Fourth Meditation Descartes talks about human free will and he talks about at least one important rule for the correct use of the will. Furthermore he argues it is within our power to abide by this rule using the faculties God has given us, and that when we fail, the fault is our own and not God's. God is responsible for giving us ideas, especially the clear and distinct ones, and He is responsible for giving us a free will which we may use to affirm an deny these ideas. But God is not responsible for our abuse of the will as when it is used to make poor judgments, nor the abuse of the faculty of judgment as a whole. But clearly the faculty of judging, the faculty of attaining certain knowledge, is a good thing. And clearly the possibility of its being abused is only an accidental by-product of the design of the faculty.

I don't believe Arnauld really objects to this general picture, but I also think he says too little in the fourth objection to entirely rule this out. If I am right though, the objections which Arnauld sketches are more specific, and can perhaps even be seen as partly simply a response to

Descartes' reluctance to anchor his discussion in the traditional sources, and in Augustine in particular. First, Arnauld warns Descartes that he will get into trouble if people thinks he has given a general account that includes the cause of sin, and of original sin in particular. *If* people believe that Descartes is offering a new suggestion as to why there is evil and how sin was originally brought into the world by the rebel angels or the first parents, he will have placed himself squarely in a theological debate the resolution of which seems not directly relevant to Descartes' own aims (CSM 2, 151–52; AT 7, 215–16).

The second and related worry that Arnauld raises is that Descartes' epistemic rule, and the general methodology associated with it, could not be considered valid beyond the realm of "the sciences and intellectual contemplation" (CSM 2, 152; AT 7, 216–17). Descartes argues that what we ought to do is to use our will to affirm only those ideas that are manifestly clear and distinct to us, and Arnauld points out that if this is so, then we ought never to hold things true on the basis of any other authority than our own. And if this is true, then we can never recommend *faith*, since faith involves (or perhaps is even essentially about) affirming things even without evidence.[8]

Descartes does not provide us with any real discussion of these objections. Instead he simply imports into the preface Arnauld's suggestion for a qualifying remark. This remark simply says the Fourth Meditation is not about the cause of sin. This is not very helpful to the reader, and without the background of Arnauld's and Descartes' exchange it is even positively misleading since it pushes the reader into the apparent dilemma I described earlier.

In Arnauld's objections there is nothing to suggest that he rejects Descartes' basic account of judgment. Indeed, the things he says about forming beliefs on the basis of understanding and on the basis of authority seem to make sense only against the background of a picture where we in some sense will or choose to affirm impressions, ideas, or propositions. If it were not in our power to choose to believe—in some sense of choose—then how could we distinguish the case where we come to believe something on the basis of some authority from the case where we simply realize we have arrived at an understanding something? The worry concerns rather the relation between Descartes' arguments about scientific truth and other domains of human belief, in particular faith and morality.

What is curious about Descartes' response to Arnauld is the fact that he fails to develop a more straightforward answer. We can still however accommodate Descartes' dismissive remarks about sin and right conduct with a teleological and so intrinsically normative reading of his account of judgment. Affirming clear and distinct ideas is an instance of correct use of the will. When Descartes argues in the preface that he is not concerned with morality in the Fourth Meditation, this should be taken to

mean that the content of those judgments with which he is here concerned is of a purely theoretical (speculative) nature, and as such have no direct bearing on conduct. He is still concerned with moral matters in the sense that he is dealing with the proper use of the will. In the sense of "moral" I am here proposing, a valid practical judgment (i.e. a judgment correctly made in matters of aims and conduct) may then be right in at least two ways: first, in that the will has been correctly used and secondly, in that the decision arrived at involves judging something good which is indeed good. Of these two, a purely cognitive judgment may be an action that is right and moral in the first sense only.

4. Teleology and Belief

Nowadays it may be that we do not think of cognitions, or such things as instances of coming to believe, as actions. Normally when one thinks of an action one thinks of something involving actual physical movement like raising an arm, or opening a door. In the Western tradition, however, forming beliefs has often been thought to be a paradigm case of action. We see this in Stoicism in particular, where the basic form of action is the assenting to impressions performed by the rational soul. Augustine too, and the tradition that follows him, discusses human action and morality most often with a focus on the mental side of things, on inner realities. Viewed in this light, Descartes theory of judgment, his doxastic voluntarism, seems simply to be a faithful continuation of a long tradition of theorizing about human action. And in this light, the two objections to doxastic voluntarism start to look like they miss the mark somewhat. This is especially clear if, as I have tried to show, Descartes simply adopts the traditional notion of *liberum arbitrium* as a teleological power, a faculty, or an instrument given to human nature in order that a human being might reach perfection. Descartes presupposes this conception of free will when he argues that the rational activity of forming judgments involves both intellect and will, both perception and assent. The power to form judgments, then, is as teleological a power as the power of free will. Just like free will is *for* making good choices, the power of judgment is *for* lining oneself up with the truth. While Descartes famously held that purposes and final ends are unknowable with respect to material nature, the essential characteristics of the soul are within our grasp: He treats as evident the notion that the soul's faculties or powers should be understood teleologically.

Let us now return to the objections to doxastic voluntarism outlined in the beginning. According to the first objection, doxastic voluntarism violates the requirement that belief be rationally justified in order to amount to knowledge. We are now in a position to measure the force of this objection. Human action should be thought of in teleological terms, and as grounded in human nature and made possible by the faculties that make

up that nature. In the case of the mental faculty of judgment, the *telos* of the faculty is very clear, since it is simply the successful attainment of truth. Descartes argues that we employ this faculty correctly if and only if the will and the intellect cooperate in the correct way. The conception of choice involved is not one of random whim, but one of an act issuing from a faculty that is firmly anchored in a teleological framework. We have the power to choose in order that we may attain a solid grip on truth by affirming the truth of true ideas. This means that we may also reject true ideas as false or decide to remain undecided, but we have to do something, or else we will not believe. This I think answers the irrationality objection. The will does not introduce an arbitrary additional element into belief; rather it is a *precondition* for belief. Not until what is perceived is affirmed as true by the will do we have a belief. And after assent is performed, we can ask whether the resulting belief is justified, and Descartes will claim that it is, if the judgment was based on clear and distinct perception.[9]

The objection William James describes is trickier. The objection is this. If our beliefs all presuppose choices, does it not follow that we should be able to affirm or deny any belief at will? But clearly, experience speaks against this. So can we really do this?

Descartes can be read as providing at least two responses to this worry: one empirical-experimental and one conceptual. The former response consists in the discussion of the *Meditations* seen as a whole: With the deployment of the method of universal doubt, the project of the Meditations entirely depends on our having a power to suspend nearly all beliefs at will. This is not to say a rational person can simply stop believing things on a whim. It typically takes work. We have to work up elaborate arguments for the other side, involving dreams and demons. It may be hard work. But if we really want to do this—if we can persuade ourselves we have good enough reason to do this—we can. Descartes here invites us to witness first-hand and hopefully sympathetically join him in the exercise of will over belief. This is the first, empirical-experimental, response.

The second answer is perhaps implied in the Fourth Meditation, but can more easily be teased out of an oft-quoted passage from a letter to Mesland, from February 1645. In it, Descartes elaborates somewhat on his voluntarist account of judgment. The question is whether assent in the case of maximally clear and distinct ideas is necessitated. In other words, the issue is whether it is in our power to refrain from forming judgments based on subjectively indefeasible evidence. Unlike in the Fourth Meditation, where Descartes restricts himself to talking about factual judgments, he is partly here concerned with normative judgments of good and bad. Apart from this difference, the account of judgment appears to be the same, with judgment typically consisting in the voluntary action of assent to ideas or perceptions supplied by the intellect:[10]

> [W]hen a very evident reason moves us in one direction, although morally speaking we can hardly move in the contrary direction, absolutely speaking we can. For it is always open to us to hold back from pursuing a clearly known good, or from admitting a clearly perceived truth, provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of our will by so doing.
>
> (CSMK, 245; AT 4, 173)

For Descartes, the limits of our ability to judge are set only and precisely by the essential characteristics of the teleological faculties involved. The activities that can possibly issue from these faculties will in each case range from a fully defective use to a fully effective use. In the case of the faculty of choice, fully effective use consists in activity entirely aimed at what is good and right and perfect.[11] In the case of the faculty of judgment, perfection consists in true judgment, broadly speaking. But because our faculty of judgment depends on our faculty of choice or *liberum arbitrium*, we need to say something about their interaction, and it is here the quoted passage is helpful.

If *liberum arbitrium* is basically our ability to do right and to cleave to the good, then we can—in principle—do absolutely anything to this end. As long as the action we perform is meaningful from the very general point of view of a rational pursuit of the good, we have exercised our power to act well, our *liberum arbitrium*, to a certain extent. And as long as our general aim is the pursuit of truth, any case of our (voluntarily) asserting something, (voluntarily) denying something, and also (voluntarily) refraining from doing either, is an exercise of the power of judgment.

It seems however that the exercise of our power of *liberum arbitrium* might in some way conflict with or undermine the exercise of the power of judgment. This is the issue Descartes homes in on in the letter to Mesland. The question really boils down to this: Is an instant of refusing to admit a clearly perceived truth consistent with the general pursuit of truth? And, in the ethical case, is refusing to pursue a clearly known good consistent with a general picture of rational action as the effect of a power of judgment and of *liberum arbitrium* conjointly, with these powers both being used as they were meant to be used?

If Descartes is committed to preserving the framework of teleological powers of the soul, then he will answer that as far as we know, we cannot use the power of judgment to not judge as true what is evidently true. Since this power is essentially a power to form true beliefs, to fail to judge true what is evidently so must be considered tantamount to a failure to exercise the power altogether. Conversely, if the power of judgment enabled us to reject what is evident, then no longer is it clear that this power is a power squarely aimed at true judgment, true belief, or knowledge. The addition of a positive ability to reject evident truths simply makes

no sense, and since it makes no sense, we cannot incorporate it as an essential element in a teleological power aimed at truth. Indeed, if we insist on the addition of this ability, then we risk losing our grip on the notion of the resulting power's being aimed at truth. In other words, the power no longer looks teleological. However, judging is also a species of intentional action, and since all human action falls within the jurisdiction of free will, it seems that any and all acts of judgment should be completely optional, completely up to the agent in such a way as to be immune to the magnetic force of truth. In this light, the full exercise of free will seems to be inconsistent with the teleological understanding of the power of judgment.

Against the background of the teleological framework, we can unpack what Descartes says in his letter to Mesland along the following lines: As actual users and abusers of the power of judgment we cannot refrain from voluntarily admitting an eminently evident truth, but if we look at the component power of *liberum arbitrium* in isolation, we know we can act or refrain from acting with respect to everything in our power, as long as we have reason to do so. Now from our practical human perspective, a reason not to believe what is evidently true is hardly conceivable. However, if there were such a reason, then of course it would mean we would be able to freely will accordingly. Or in other words, "absolutely" speaking we are able to reject evident truths, but "morally" speaking we are not.

The issue in the letter to Mesland can thus be seen as providing further evidence of the prominence of teleology in Descartes' view of the human rational soul, of freedom, and of judgment as a species of intentional, end-directed activity. It follows from this picture that even in those cases where we cannot refrain from affirming the truth of something, our belief still belongs to the domain of freely and voluntarily performed action. That all judgments are in this way "willed" simply follows from the teleological understanding of the two powers—the power of judgment and the power of *liberum arbitrium* on which it depends.

Notes

1 For comments and discussion I am very grateful to Calvin Normore, who acted as the commentator on an earlier version of this chapter, presented at the conference in honor of Lilli Alanen from which many of the chapters in the present volume derive. I also wish to thank the editors for their sound and critical suggestions, and their patience.

2 See Carriero 2009, esp. 243–64, and Alanen 2003, 240 ff., 2012.

3 For a comprehensive and detailed study of the philosophical affinities between Descartes and Augustine, see Menn 1998.

4 See CSM 2, 38; AT 7, 54: "I realize that I am, as it were, something intermediate between God and nothingness, or between supreme being and non-being: my nature is such that in so far as I was created by the supreme being, there is nothing in me to enable me to go wrong or lead me astray; but in so far as

I participate in nothingness or non-being, that is, in so far as I am not myself the supreme being and am lacking in countless respects, it is no wonder that I make mistakes. I understand, then, that error as such is not something real which depends on God, but merely a defect". See also CSM 2, 42; AT 7, 61: "For it is surely no imperfection in God that he has given me the freedom to assent or not to assent in those cases where he did not endow my intellect with a clear and distinct perception; but it is undoubtedly an imperfection in me to misuse that freedom and make judgements about matters which I do not fully understand".

5 Augustine does not make the distinction between negation and privation explicitly in *De libero arbitrio,* but it is arguably implied, for instance in passages such as the following: "See how much good is missing in a body that does not have hands! Yet hands are used for evil when someone does cruel or disgraceful things with them. [. . .] Therefore, just as you approve of these things in the body [e.g., hands] and praise Him Who gave these good things, disregarding those who use them for evil, you should also admit that free will, without which no one can live rightly, is a good thing and a divine gift—and also that those who use this good for evil should be damned, rather than He Who gave it ought not to have given it" (*On Free Choice,* 2.18.48: Augustine 2010, 67).

6 For the truth rule, see CSM 2, 24; AT 7, 35.

7 See also CSM 2, 43; AT 7, 61–62 for a nearly identical claim.

8 That such a problem should arise is no surprise. I think it can even arguably be found in Augustine himself. Augustine starts developing his theodicy in the early book 1 of *De libero arbitrio* (*On the Free Choice of the Will*). Here he is very much inspired by the old testament Wisdom books and platonism, and he thinks of moral betterment very much simply as the pursuit and attainment of wisdom. The book from which Arnauld quotes, *De utilitate credendi* (*On the utility of faith*), is among Augustine's last works. Here we find a much more somber Augustine who stresses the limitations of human understanding and therefore underlines the necessity of acknowledging other sources of authority than reason. Also, the late Augustine is here also very conscious of the cultural and political challenges Christianity faces as a societal movement.

9 At this point we are also in a better position to see at which point the comparison between Descartes' Fourth Meditation and Augustine's *De libero arbitrio* falls short. Augustine explores free will as a teleological power in the light of worries about how to think consistently about the human condition and misery and evil and a good God. By contrast, Descartes is rather presupposing a traditional notion of free will as a teleological power as an essential element of his own account of the—teleological—power of judgment.

10 To my knowledge, all commentators agree that Descartes is here still committed to doxastic voluntarism. There is however some discussion about whether or not the passage provides us with evidence for what is often called "direct", as opposed to "indirect", doxastic voluntarism—"DDV" and "IDV", respectively. See Alanen 2003, 242–43; Carriero 2009, 262–63. For a recent overview of the discussion, see Schüssler 2013, who argues for a form of DDV. For a case for Descartes's being committed to IDV, see Forsman 2017.

11 This teleological understanding of free will explains Descartes's insistence in Meditation Four that he is more free when he moves towards what is true and good than away from it and his devaluation of the so-called freedom of indifference. "For if I always saw clearly what was true and good, I should never have to deliberate about the right judgment or choice; in that case, although I should be wholly free, it would be impossible for me to be in a

state of indifference" (CSM 2, 40; AT 7, 58). For a discussion of the resulting asymmetrical view of freedom, where good and bad, true and false, are not on par, see Ragland 2007, 130, 2016, 161–65.

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12 Descartes' *Generosité*[1]

Calvin G. Normore

1. A Strange Dualism

Descartes is the most famous dualist—and yet even a little thought about his views shows that as a dualist he is a strange one. In the case of Descartes' human a substance, a particular mind, is united to a human body which is itself individuated as that human body only by its relation to that mind. The human body is not, Descartes insists to Mesland, itself numerically the same piece of matter over time so that even if a particular piece of matter is a substance for Descartes it is not the continuing subject of the mind-body union.[2] Descartes is subtle and careful about the status of the composite which is the union of mind and body. He nowhere calls it a thing (*res*) and he is careful never to call it a substance in any technical context. Yet he insists that the unity involved is more than an accidental unity.[3]

In his correspondence with the Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia Descartes identifies the mind-body union as something of which we have a primitive notion. He suggests to Elisabeth that the mind-body union cannot be understood, properly speaking, but can more properly be felt. It is, he suggests, the passions of the soul which exhibit the union to us.[4]

2. Passions and the Good

There were, broadly speaking, two medieval traditions of work on the passions, a medical tradition and a moral tradition. Descartes claims in a prefatory letter to his central work on the passions, his treatise *Les Passions de l'âme*, that he approaches the subject not as a moralist or as a rhetorician but *en physicien*. Though a 'physicien' in 17th century French could mean anyone concerned with things physical, I take this to put him loosely in the medical camp. Like the medical writers he is greatly concerned with the physiological and physical causes of passions and with their physical expression. Yet Descartes is being at least a little disingenuous when he denies writing as a moralist. *Les Passions de l'âme* grew out

of discussions with Elisabeth in which medical and moral considerations are closely intertwined. Elisabeth begins the correspondence by questioning Descartes about how the soul can move the body but the discussion turns quickly to Elisabeth's health. Descartes diagnoses her disorders as at least partially psychosomatic (a diagnosis which Elisabeth readily accepts) and very quickly they are involved in a full dress discussion of the passions, their physiological causes and effects, and their role in a proper human life. I suggest that as Descartes continued to think about the passions it was ever more as a moralist.

Descartes and Elisabeth have both to locate themselves in a very traditional debate about whether the passions are evils. The Stoic view was that they were. The Stoics took it that every passion involved assent to a false judgement. Since the Stoic sage made no false judgements the Stoic sage had no passions. Exactly how close to having passions a Stoic sage could come was a matter of some controversy. Some passions some Stoics at least thought to have analogues which did not involve false judgement (*eupatheiai*). One was permitted, for example, a certain satisfaction at this the best of all possible worlds.

Aristotle and his Peripatetic followers allowed passion a more positive role. The properly brought up Aristotelian gentleman not only judged aright but felt aright and could get quite exercised about it. So could the Christian God—who was by times an angry God—and so it is not surprising that Christian thinkers tended to be more positive toward the passions than a good Stoic might wish. Still the role of the passions in human affairs was by no means a settled issue—even among pious Christians—and Descartes and Elisabeth had a number of respectable options.

Descartes works out his views about the passions in the course of his correspondence with Elisabeth. The subject first comes up in a serious way in the summer of 1645 and by the following winter Descartes thinks himself ready to write out a little treatise on the passions and to send it to Elisabeth. There is every reason to think his views continued to evolve throughout this period right up until he sent the proofs of *Les Passions de l'âme*, his last major work, to the publishers in Amsterdam and Paris in the Fall of 1649 and almost immediately embarked on his ill-fated trip to Sweden.

Although Descartes starts out his side of the discussion with Elisabeth by suggesting that they read Seneca's *De Beata Vita* together and proceeds to give her a chapter by chapter report of his response to that work his own view from the beginning seems to have been that the passions are a very good thing indeed. He never gave up this view and by the end of *Les Passions de l'âme* he is prepared to title the final article "That all the good and evil of this life depend on them alone" and to write in it that: "For the rest the soul is able to have pleasures by itself. But those which are common to it and the body depend entirely on the passions, so that

the humans they can move the most are most capable of tasting sweetness in this life" (AT 11, 488; my translation).

Descartes argues not only that the pleasures of this life depend upon the passions but, unusual for him, assigns to the passions a final cause:

> The use of all the passions consists in this alone; they dispose the soul to will the things nature tells us are useful and to persist in this volition, just as the same agitation of spirits that usually causes them disposes the body to the movements conducive to the execution of those things.[5]
>
> (Art. 52: AT 11, 372; Voss, 51–52)

So the passions dispose the soul to will what nature tells us is useful—but useful for what? Descartes explains a bit earlier: "the principal effect of all the passions in men is that they incite and dispose their soul to will the things for which they prepare their body, so that the sensation of fear incites it to will to flee, that of boldness to will to do battle, and so on for the rest" (art. 40: AT 11, 359; Voss, 40–41). Descartes explains a bit later that the way the passions dispose the soul to have this useful effect and thus their utility

> consists only in their strengthening thoughts which it is good that [the soul preserve] and which could otherwise easily be effaced from it and causing them to endure in the soul. So too all the evil they can cause consists either in their strengthening and preserving those thoughts more than is necessary or in their strengthening and preserving others it is not good to dwell upon.
>
> (Art. 74: AT 11, 383; Voss, 59)

In this last passage Descartes connects the utility of the passions with thoughts it is good (or not) to dwell upon. The Passions are ultimately useful because their natural effects are good; but good for what?

Descartes seems to work with several inter-related notions of good. His most complete treatment of them is the letter to Queen Christina of Sweden of November 20, 1647, a letter which he himself sometimes refers to as the letter on the Sovereign Good. There he distinguishes several senses of the term 'sovereign good':

> One can consider the goodness of each thing in itself, without relating it to others, in which sense it is evident that God is the sovereign good, because he is incomparably more perfect than creatures; but one can also relate it to us, and in this sense I see nothing we ought to esteem good, except what in some fashion pertains to us and is a perfection for us to possess. . . . I consider that we ought to esteem good, from our point of view, only those things we possess, or else

> have the power of acquiring. That being assumed, it seems to me the sovereign good of all men together is an amalgamation or collection of all the goods, as much of the soul as of the body and fortune, that can be in individual men; but the sovereign good of each person in particular is a completely different thing, and consists only in a firm will to do well, and the contentment which that produces. The reason for saying this is that I remark no other good that seems to me so great nor is entirely in the power of each person. As for goods of the body and fortune, they do not depend absolutely upon us; and those of the soul all relate to two principal goods, namely the one to know and the other to will, what is good; yet such knowledge is often beyond our forces; that is why there remains only our will of which we can absolutely dispose. And I do not see that it is possible to use it better than by always reserving a firm and constant resolution to do exactly all the things one shall judge to be better, and to employ all the forces of one's mind to know them well. It is in that alone that all the virtues consist; it is that alone which, properly speaking, merits praise and glory; finally it is from that alone that always results the greatest and most solid contentment of life. And thus I deem that in that consists the sovereign good.[6]
>
> (AT 5, 82–83; Blom, 227–28)

This is a striking doctrine. Greek moral theory had for the most part held that the good for us had to be something which was entirely up to us—thus it had identified the good with a state of soul. The exception to this consensus was Aristotle, who maintained that the highest good for us was *eudaimonia* (often translated 'human flourishing') which as the exercise of virtue in a complete life depended upon favourable external conditions—depended, in short, upon fortune. Although it did not meet the approval of the philosophers outside his school, Aristotle's conception was reflected in the views of many of the Roman historians and the role of fortune in human affairs was a popular topic for discussion among them. Christianity, with its early Platonist bias, gave fortune a very bad name (witness Boethius on the subject) and reinforced the view that the good for us did not depend upon external goods, but Christianity also had a side which emphasized that the good for us, enjoyment of union with God in heaven, depended upon God's grace as upon a free gift. It was not something we could guarantee for ourselves.

The Renaissance was in part a revival of ancient views on this issue. Cicero's largely Stoic conception of the good became very popular and both Stoic and Epicurean views were explicitly embraced. But the Renaissance also saw a new strand in the tapestry—Machiavelli's conception of virtue.

Machiavelli worked out his conception of virtue in the context of particular historical examples and of his own first-hand experience of

the careers of Cesar Borgia and Pope Julius II. From these cases and his historical studies Machiavelli extracted three ingredients which he came to think of as key to virtue. First and perhaps most salient was the importance of boldness and decisiveness. Second was the inescapability of fortune in human affairs and third, following on the second, was the importance of adapting one's behaviour to the prevailing conditions and the folly of setting up practices to be followed independent of circumstances. None of these ingredients was exactly new. The importance of adapting one's behaviour to the circumstances could be seen rather as a specification of the traditional virtue of prudence—itself closely connected with the Aristotelian conception of practical wisdom. The inescapability of fortune was a distinctive feature of the Aristotelian conception. Most striking perhaps is Machiavelli's emphasis on decisiveness and resolution—but that too had its roots in the Christianized Aristotelian tradition and in particular in the notion of *magnanimitas*.

For Aristotle the crowning virtue—the one which defined the ideal human—was what he called *megalopsychia*. The natural translation of this is *magnanimitas*. But 'magnanimitas' from its earliest uses in Cicero (*De Officiis* I, 19) carried the connotation of courage in the face of adversity, and, as Margaret Greaves has emphasized, during the Middle Ages the concept developed in two different directions. Among the scholars, all of whom after the twelfth century were heavily influenced by Aristotle, it came to be the crowning virtue of the ideal Christian—summing up the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude. In popular life and literature it became the term for heroic virtue as typified in such figures as Alexander the Great—especially in his charisma, liberality, and capacity for love. By the end of the Middle Ages the term was being used in all the Romance languages and in English in senses which borrowed from both of these traditions. Greaves sums up its use in the English Renaissance thus:

> Milton uses it in all its apparent senses, of courage, noble ambition, courageous sacrifice, forbearance and generosity. But, above all, it is the sum of Christian greatness. He uses it, as Bacon does, for an ambition which is divinely inspired and sustained; magnanimity derives ultimately from man's relationship with God, that divine power of self-knowing, of God-ward aspiration, which confers the right of government over other creatures just in so far as man acknowledges his own creaturely estate.
>
> (Greaves 1964, 26)

So all of the positive ingredients in Machiavellian virtue are already present in the tradition about magnanimity. What Machiavelli did which was genuinely novel in the medieval context and which earned him the condemnation of the wider intellectual community for quite some time

was to leave God entirely out of the picture. Corollary with this is his assumption that the Prince qua prince need not concern himself with the state of his immortal soul. The Prince's concern is with the preservation of his very earthly state and all that concerns him of honour will follow from his success in doing so.

3. True Virtue

Descartes knew Machiavelli's work. Elisabeth had asked him his opinion of *The Prince* and in September 1646 Descartes wrote to her a letter on the whole rather critical of it. His fundamental complaint, as he explains, is that:

> it is a very bad subject for making books to undertake to lay down therein precepts such that, at the end of the tale, they provide no assurance to those to whom they are given for as the author himself admits, the princes cannot guard against the first person who would wish to neglect his own life in order to revenge himself upon them.
>
> (AT 4, 487; Blom, 188)

In short his complaint is that the advice Machiavelli gives still leaves the Prince's good (understood in Machiavelli's own terms) to fortune.

Descartes himself gives rather different advice. He agrees with Machiavelli on the importance of resolution and the evil of regret. He agrees that if a prince cannot be assured of the fidelity of those in his state with the power to oppose him "he should weaken them and, insofar as they are inclined to upset the state, should consider them only as enemies" and he agrees that when faced with ruin a prince is not bound by his promises but he writes:

> Thus I disapprove the maxim of chapter 15: That the world being very corrupted, it is impossible to avoid ruining oneself if one wishes to be a good man, and that to maintain himself a prince must learn to be wicked when the occasion requires—unless perhaps by a good man he means one superstitious and simple, who dares not do battle on the Sabbath, and whose conscience cannot rest until he changes the religion of his people. But thinking of a good man as one who does everything true reason dictates to him, it is certain that the best thing is to try always to be good.
>
> (AT 4, 490; Blom, 190)

In this last sentence Descartes introduces his own doctrine of 'true' virtue –'true' virtue is acting on the basis of right reason. He had already outlined it to Elisabeth in August 1645 writing:

> Nevertheless, all sorts of desires are not incompatible with beatitude, but only those accompanied by impatience and sadness. Nor is it necessary that our reason not err; it suffices that our conscience show us we have never lacked the resoluteness and virtue to perform everything we have judged to be better, and accordingly virtue alone is sufficient to render us content in this life. But yet, when not illuminated by the understanding, virtue can be false—which is to say, the will and resolution to do well can carry us toward bad things when we believe them good—the contentment that derives from it is not solid. And because one ordinarily opposes such virtue to pleasures, appetites and passions, it is very difficult to put it into practice. However the right use of reason, by giving us a true knowledge of the good, prevents virtue from being false and even reconciling it with permissible pleasures, renders its practice so easy, and by making us know the condition of our nature, so limits our desires, that we must admit the greatest happiness of a man depends upon this right use of reason and that consequently the study which brings one to acquire it is the most useful occupation one can have as it is also without a doubt the most agreeable and sweet of occupations.
>
> (AT 4, 267; Blom, 134)

In the letter to Queen Christina on the Sovereign Good we saw Descartes claiming that for each of us the chief good "consists only in a firm will to do well, and the contentment which that produces". Here in this earlier letter we find him admitting that that will and resolution when uninformed by right reason can lead us to seek false goods and so the contentment it produces is not solid. Descartes' solution to this apparent tension is his doctrine of generosity.

4. *Generosité*

Descartes' discussion of generosity begins as a discussion of magnanimity. Article 54 of Part II of *Les Passions de l'âme* is titled "Esteem and Scorn, Generosity or Pride and Humility or Servility" yet in the body of the article Descartes talks not about generosity but about magnanimity. This is interesting both because it shows us the conceptual background of generosity and because it suggests something about the composition of the treatise.

Descartes drafted his 'little treatise on the passions' during the winter of 1645–1646 and sent it to Elisabeth early in 1646. She replied in April approving the work on the whole while asking for clarification of some of the connections between the typology of the passions and the physiology. But her main point was in a different direction. She writes:

> But I find still less difficulty in understanding everything you say about the passions than in practicing the remedies you order against

> their excesses. For how is one to foresee all the accidents that can happen in life—accidents it is impossible to enumerate? And how can we prevent ourselves from ardently desiring things that necessarily tend to the conservation of man (like health and the means to live) which nevertheless do not depend upon man's decision? As for knowledge of the truth, the desire for it is so just that it exists naturally in all men, but it would be necessary to have an infinite knowledge to know the just value of the goods and evils that customarily rouse us, since there are very many more of them than a single person should be able to imagine, and because, to imagine them, he would have to know perfectly everything that exists in the world.
>
> (AT 4, 405; Blom, 179)

Descartes rewrote his little treatise extensively between the spring of 1646 and his final submission to the publisher in September 1649. In November 1647 he wrote Elisabeth, rather apologetically, that he was sending to Chanut for Queen Christina some of the letters he had written Elisabeth and "the small treatise on the passions which I have had some pains to have transcribed from a rather confused draft I had kept" (AT 5, 89; Blom, 233). If he made revisions for Christina before sending it then they may well have been merely cosmetic but more were to come. On April 23, 1649, he wrote to Clerselier that:

> I do not expect that the treatise on the passions will be printed before I arrive in Sweden; for I have been indolent in revising it and adding the things you thought lacking, which will increase its length by a third. It will contain three parts, of which the first will deal with the passions in general, and incidentally the nature of the soul, the second with the six primitive passions, and the third with all the others.
>
> (AT 5, 353; CSMK, 376)

Here is the first description we have of the treatise as we now find it. What was the material which increased its bulk by a third?

Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (1987) has argued that it is precisely the material on generosity (generosité) which made up much of the added third. One reason for thinking this is that Descartes' shift of terminology from magnanimity to generosity is so awkward. I've already alluded to the oddity of article 54. There is more. When generosity is introduced in article 153 it is as though the reader will not be surprised to see it but later in article 161 Descartes' pauses to add rather strangely that:

> although it is easy to believe that all the souls God put in our bodies are not equally noble and strong (which is the reason I have named

> this virtue generosity, following the usage of our language, rather than magnanimity following the usage of the schools where it is not well understood).
>
> (AT 11, 453; Voss, 109)

It is plausible then, though not certain, that the material on generosity is as Rodis-Lewis puts it 'the final fruit of Descartes' philosophy'. If it is then there is a sense in which this is Descartes' most mature thought but, if he is working as quickly as the discrepancy in terminology in article 54 suggests, it may not be his best worked out thought.

So what is this virtue of magnanimity/generosity for Descartes? He defines it in article 153:

> So I believe that true Generosity, which makes a man esteem himself as highly as he can legitimately esteem himself, consists only in this: partly in his understanding that there is nothing which truly belongs to him but this free control of his volitions, and no reason why he ought to be praised or blamed except that he uses it well or badly; and partly in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well, that is never to lack the volition to undertake and execute all the things he judges to be best—which is to follow virtue perfectly.
>
> (AT 11, 446; Voss, 104)

Generosity then consists partly in understanding something and partly in feeling a resolution. I share the view that passions are not constituted by judgements and that understandings are, typically, judgements. Isn't generosity a counter-example? I think not, because I think that Descartes is of the mind that while there is a passion involved in true generosity, generosity is not itself precisely a passion.

First let us note that true generosity is not opposed to virtuous Humility which Descartes defines in article 155 thus:

> And virtuous Humility just consists in this: our reflection on the infirmity of our nature and on the errors we may have previously committed or are capable of committing—which are no less than those which may be committed by others—causes us not to prefer ourselves to anyone, but to think that since others have their own free will just as we do, they can use it too.
>
> (AT 11, 447; Voss, 105)

True generosity and virtuous Humility are contrasted with Pride and Servility. Servility

> consists mainly in feeling weak or not very resolute, and in being unable to keep from doing things we will later repent of, as though we

> did not have full use of our free will, and also in believing we cannot survive by ourselves or do without many things whose acquisition depends on others.
>
> (Art. 159: AT 11, 450; Voss, 106)

Pride, in turn, Descartes describes this way: "All those who contrive a good opinion of themselves for some other cause, whatever it may be, have no true generosity, but only a Pride which is always extremely unvirtuous—although it is the more so, the more unjust the cause for which one esteems oneself" (art. 157: AT 11, 448; Voss, 105).

Descartes is himself aware that there is something odd about regarding these virtues and vices as passions. In article 160 he writes:

> Furthermore it is easy to understand that Pride and Servility are not only vices but Passions because their excitation is very noticeable externally in those who are suddenly puffed up or cast down by some new occasion. But it may be doubted whether Generosity and Humility, which are virtues, can also be Passions, because their movements are less noticeable and because virtue does not partake of the nature of Passion as much as vice does. Still I see no reason at all why the same movement of spirits that serves to strengthen a thought when it has a foundation that is bad could not serve to strengthen it when it has one that is just. And because Pride and Generosity consist only in the good opinion we have of ourselves, and differ only in that the opinion is unjust in one and just in the other, it seems to me that they can be referred to a single passion—excited by a movement composed of those of Wonder, Joy and Love, both that which we have for ourselves and that which we have for the thing making us esteem ourselves. Similarly, on the other hand, the movement which excites Humility, whether virtuous or unvirtuous, is composed of those of Wonder, Sadness, and Love, for ourselves, mingled with hatred for the defects making us scorn ourselves.
>
> (AT 11, 451; Voss, 107)

As I read this passage Descartes is asserting that Generosity and Pride are the same passion as are Humility and Servility, but Generosity is not the same thing as Pride. Indeed the former is a virtue and the latter a vice. What distinguishes the virtue from the vice is the judgement we make—in the virtuous case that we are estimable because we have and rightly use our free will, in the vicious case that we are estimable for some other reason. Since the Passion is the same but the judgements are different I take it that the judgement is no part of the Passion.

There is then a passion of the soul which we may denominate either generosity or pride and which, when it is caused by our recognizing that only our volitions are properly ours and by the recognition and feeling

that we will as best we can, is (or produces?) the virtue of Generosity—which makes us esteem ourselves as much as is legitimate.

5. The Good and Our Good

Let me pause a moment to dwell on the connections between Cartesian Generosity and earlier and contemporary notions of *magnanimity*. At the root of both lies what we might call the sense of self-worth. The Aristotelian great-souled person and the Cartesian generous person both regard themselves as of value, but Descartes' account of why we are of value is distinctive. His claim is that we are valuable because we have free will and because we are aware of ourselves as using this free will for good. To value ourselves for any other reason is, he claims, the vice of Pride. Thus we have, at least at first blush, a resolution of the tension between the thought that virtue just consists in willing the best we know how and the thought that virtue consists in willing that is informed by right reason. The resolution is that right reason itself tells us to will as best we know how. Someone who acts out of generosity is doing just this—willing as best she knows how because she sees that right reason advises her to do this.

One might wonder whether this is all right reason might advise.[7] After all, as Descartes suggests to Elisabeth in the dedicatory letter with which he introduces the *Principles of Philosophy*, while "whoever has the firm and effective will to always use his reason correctly, as far as is in his power, and to pursue all that which he knows to be best, is truly wise as far as his nature permits" still "two things are required for the wisdom thus described, i.e. perceptiveness of the intellect and inclination of the will" and though "no one is incapable of that which depends upon the will", "some people have a much keener intellect than others" and so are able to be wiser than others (AT 8A, 2–3; CSM 1, 191). Indeed Descartes goes on to suggest that Elisabeth herself has, in virtue of her zeal for truth and her keen intellect, all that is required for "the most perfect and sublime wisdom"—strongly suggesting that were her intellect less keen her wisdom and so her virtue would be less perfect!

Moreover, if we suppose that right reason dictates merely that we use our wills to follow the dictates of right reason we are threatened with ungroundedness. Most ethical theories have it that good intentions are intentions to perform good acts—which acts are themselves specified without reference to the intentions to perform them. Descartes, on the other hand, identifies our individual chief good with our resolute use of our wills to track the good. But what good are we then tracking? To use our wills to track our chief good—namely that we use our wills to track the good seems to threaten what the Medievals called *nugatio*—we use our will to track the good of using our wills to track the good of using our wills . . . etc. But what else could we use our wills to track?

Descartes does not deny that there are goods for us other than our chief good—there are the goods of the union (closely connected with keeping the body in a state so that the soul can continue to animate it) and the goods of the soul—including truth. Perhaps it is these goods which we are resolutely to use our wills to pursue. But these are the very goods which we cannot guarantee for ourselves and so those in which Descartes argued we were not to invest ourselves. Is he suggesting then that our good consists in resolutely seeking things which are not really worth seeking?

Here I suggest we need to draw a distinction between the good for us in the sense of that towards which we should aim and the good for us in the sense of that which it would be better for us to have.[8] In the Aristotelian tradition it is assumed that one aims at one's own *eudaimonia* and so at the exercise of one's virtue in a complete life. But what if the very exercise of one's virtue was undermining of *eudaimonia*? In the Christian context one was required to love God above all else. But to love something above all else entailed being willing to sacrifice everything else for its sake. Suppose then one had to choose between God and one's own beatitude. What was one to do? A tradition going back to Anselm of Canterbury had argued that in such a case one should sacrifice one's own beatitude for God's sake (beatitude was Boethius' rendering of *eudaimonia*). The consequence was that although one's own beatitude was the best thing for one it was not that at which one should ultimately aim!

This, I suggest, is the root of the tension in Descartes' account. He admires Elisabeth for her zeal in pursuing the-good-according-to-right-reason and for her intellectual prowess in recognizing the good according to right reason but only the first is something at which we should (or even could) aim. Thus, although it would be better for us to be more enlightened, if we now aim with all our might to do what right reason dictates we are no better if we get that right than if we get it wrong—more admirable, yes, but more estimable, no! Thus right reason does not tell us to get things right—that is outside our control—but only to attempt as best we can to do so. Our intellect will indeed deliver a judgement about which goods it would be better for us to have and it will tell us to pursue them—but only because in pursuing them we pursue what right reason dictates to us and so that is our ultimate goal.

6. Resisting the Temptation to Divinity

Still, so far we seem very far from the twentieth century use of the word 'generosity' (or the French *generosité*), Cartesian generosity truly begins at home. But Descartes argues that generosity is other-regarding too. He titles article 154 "Generosity prevents us from having contempt for others". And he writes:

> Those who possess this knowledge and this feeling about themselves readily come to believe that any other person can have the same knowledge and feeling about himself, because this involves nothing which depends on someone else. That is why such people never have contempt for anyone. Although they often see that others do wrong in ways that show up their weakness, they are nevertheless more inclined to excuse than to blame them and to regard such wrongdoing as due rather to lack of knowledge than to lack of a virtuous will. Just as they do not consider themselves much inferior to those who have greater wealth or honour, or even to those who have more intelligence, knowledge or beauty, or generally to those who surpass them in some other perfections, equally they do not have much more esteem for themselves than for those whom they surpass. For all these things seem to them to be very unimportant, by contrast with the virtuous will for which alone they esteem themselves, and which they suppose also to be present, or at least capable of being present, in every other person.
>
> (AT 11, 446–47; CSM 1, 384)

Perhaps the strangest thing about this article is its apparent insistence on a double standard for generosity. The generous person esteems herself because she understands herself to have as her own exactly her free will and feels herself resolute about intending its use for good. But while the generous person recognizes the free will of others the generous person apparently does not clear-headedly assess whether others are resolute in its good employment but are "more inclined to excuse than to blame them, and to believe that they commit [those errors] through lack of understanding rather than lack of good will" and while the generous person esteems himself for the good will he perceives in himself he esteems others for the good will which he supposes there to be—or at least to be capable of being—in every other human.

The generous person then, at least gives others the benefit of the doubt. She puts the weakness of others down to non-culpable lack of understanding rather than to culpable perversity of will. Descartes gives no story about why we should do this rather than assess others more coldly—on the basis of the most plausible explanation of their actions. One possibility, which André Gombay has stressed, is that this is a natural consequence of the fact that the passion which generosity and pride share is a mixture of Wonder, Joy, and Love (Gombay 2007, ch. 8). Love, according to Descartes, is a joining of oneself in volition with the beloved—it is considering oneself as part of a whole of which the beloved is also part. Descartes suggests that to do this is, *inter alia*, to think the beloved good. Hence if generosity were induced by others as well as oneself it would involve, as Descartes says, loving the cause of the esteem one has for oneself. Since that cause would be others we would love them and

since we would love them we would think them good. Since goodness in persons is a matter of free will and the resolution to use it, we would, naturally, suppose them to have such.

That is a plausible story of how we can come naturally to suppose in others a resolution to will well for which we do not have any evidence but it still leaves it mysterious why it is good that we do so.

Generosity is a matter of esteeming oneself as highly as one legitimately can. Just how highly is that? Rodis-Lewis has emphasized the passage in the letter on the Supreme Good in which Descartes writes that:

> Now free will is in itself the noblest thing we can have, since it makes us in a way equal to God and seems to exempt us from being his subjects; and so its correct use is the greatest of all the goods we possess; indeed there is nothing that is more our own or that matters more to us. From all this it follows that nothing but free will can produce our greatest happiness.
>
> (AT 5, 85; CSMK, 326)

The theme that it is in our wills that we most resemble God is an old one for Descartes—the will is the only thing besides God of which he predicates the positive adjective 'infinite' (as contrasted with the negative ('indefinite') in the *Meditations*). In the letter to Queen Christina on the supreme good, he seems to go beyond that and to take up the ancient Christian theme that it is our power to not do what seems best to us which tempts us to think that we can be as gods.[9]

Rodis-Lewis suggests that generosity for Descartes consists not only in our understanding ourselves to have this power but in our feeling our resolution not to use it—that is, our feeling our resolution to do what our intellect tells us is best rather than to set up our own goals independent of right reason. If this is right (and it certainly is a compelling idea) then greatness of soul for Descartes consists precisely in our recognizing that we could set ourselves up as gods—and our firmly resolving not to do so.

7. The Master Virtue

Descartes has a positive view of the passions—they are instituted by nature to assist in the preservation of the mind-body union—but he is also of the view that they are easily disordered. It is generosity, he suggests, that is the master virtue which is the key to remedying this disorder. As he writes in article 156 of *Les Passions de l'âme*:

> Those who are generous in this way are naturally led to do great deeds, and at the same time not to undertake anything of which they do not feel themselves capable. And because they esteem nothing more highly than doing good to others and disregarding their own

> self-interest, they are always perfectly courteous, gracious and obliging to everyone. Moreover they have complete command over their passions. In particular, they have mastery over their desires, and over jealousy and envy, because everything they think sufficiently valuable to be worth pursuing is such that its acquisition depends solely on themselves; over hatred of other people, because they have esteem for everyone; over fear, because of the self-assurance which confidence in their own virtue gives them; and finally over anger, because they have very little esteem for everything that depends on others, and so they never give their enemies any advantage by acknowledging that they are injured by them.
>
> (AT 11, 447–48; CSM 1, 385)

As he explains to Elisabeth, it is this mastery over the passions which characterizes the greatest souls (letter of 18 May 1645, AT 4, 202–03; Blom, 118–19).

Descartes seems to have conceived of the sciences with the metaphor of a tree. In his early work the fruit of the tree is medicine and Descartes seems to have hoped to achieve a medicine which would preserve the mind-body union for at least over a hundred years.[10] And as late as October 1645 he wrote to the Marquess of Newcastle that "the preservation of health has always been the principal end of my studies" (AT 4, 329; CSMK, 275). Even when he began the correspondence with Elisabeth, however, Descartes seems to have been thinking of our good in less medical terms and by 1646 he seems to have changed his mind about his goal. He writes to Chanut that:

> I will say to you in confidence that such notion of physics as I have tried to acquire has greatly served me in establishing certain foundations in morals and that on this point I am more easily satisfied than on many others bearing upon medicine even though I have employed very much more time at them. For, in place of discovering the means for conserving life, I have found another, very much easier and more certain, which is not to fear death, without, however, being on that account chagrined, as ordinarily are they whose wisdom is completely taken from the teachings of others and rests upon foundations depending only on the prudence and authority of men.
>
> (AT 4, 441; CSMK, 289)

Descartes does not think that generosity is equally easy for all of us. He emphasizes that its ease is a matter of innate temperament and sometimes connects it with aristocratic birth, but he is steadfast that it is possible for us all. Thus as a tool for facing death it has the virtue of being entirely in our power.

Descartes' "much easier and more certain way" involves a conception of what should matter to us which I have argued puts him in the middle of a complex traditional controversy about virtues and passions. At the centre of his conception lies his conception of generosity—a conception which is itself a revaluation of the Aristotelian notion of magnanimity and a subtle riposte to the Machiavellian conception of virtue. It is, as is so much of Descartes' thought, both boldly innovative and very deeply conservative. Instead of leaving God out of his picture of the good as Machiavelli had done, Descartes makes God central. It is in our realism about values and our submission to them in the face of our recognition that we have the power to not do so that we are, according to Descartes, at our greatest. Descartes optimistically expects that other goods will follow in the train of virtue (a nod to the tradition that fortune favours the brave) but it is in using our wills to track the good to the best of our ability and the contentment that comes from our awareness that that is what we are doing that our good itself consists.

Notes

1 This chapter began in October 2001 as a talk at a birthday party for Lilli Alanen. It seemed to me then, and it seems to me now that there could be no subject better fitting an occasion involving Lilli than generosity in all its forms. The text was then put aside until the conference in honour of Lilli from which the present volume has come. A considerable amount of new work on Descartes' account of the passions had appeared in the interval (some of the best by Lilli) necessitating rethinking the whole subject of *generosité* in Descartes. Circumstance prevented a revised text from being presented at that meeting. (I was fortunate to be able instead to comment there on Tomas Ekenberg's talk from which came his chapter in this volume and I thank him and the organizers for making my virtual presence there possible.) When plans for this volume emerged from that meeting, I took up the text again and presented versions of it to audiences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2016 and at the University of Calgary in 2017. I thank audiences at both and especially Alan Nelson at UNC and Jack MacIntosh at Calgary for very helpful comments, Martina Reuter and Frans Svensson for their patience, and Frans for encouraging me to rethink the role of external goods in Descartes' thinking about virtue.

2 "But when we speak of the body of a man, we do not mean a determinate part of matter, or one that has a determinate size; we mean simply the whole of the matter which is united to the soul of that man. And so, even though that matter changes, and its quantity increases or decreases, we still believe that it is the same body, *idem in numero* the same body, so long as it remains joined and substantially united with the same soul; and we think that this body is whole and entire so long as it has in itself all the dispositions required to preserve that union" (letter to Mesland, Feb. 9, 1645, AT 4, 166; CSMK, 243).

3 It is, he suggests, a 'union of composition' which Deborah Brown and I take to be compatible with a substantial union but not to require constituting a substance. Cf AT 7, 423–24; CSM 2, 285–86.AT 7:423–4; CSM 2:285–6)

4 "[W]hat belongs to the union of the soul and body is known only obscurely by the intellect alone or even by the intellect aided by the imagination, but is

known very clearly by the senses. That is why people who never philosophize and use only their senses have no doubt that the soul moves the body and that the body acts on the soul" (letter to Elisabeth, June 28, 1643, AT 3, 692; CSMK, 227).

5 The translation is from Voss 1989. This work is referenced only as "Voss" followed by a page number.

6 The translation is from Blom 1978. This work is referenced as "Blom" followed by page number.

7 And Frans Svensson has, see his chapter in this volume.

8 The issue had already come up as one between Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaine at the beginning of the fourteenth century and was very much alive in Descartes' day. Cf. McGrade, Kilcullen, and Kempshall (eds.) 2012, ch. 5 and 6.

9 One traditional Christian account of the sin of Lucifer is that he willed to follow his own will rather than God's. He willed to be, in Kant's sense, autonomous, rather than, in the traditional Christian sense, obedient.

10 Letter to Huygens, December 4, 1637, AT 1, 649; CSMK, 76.

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13 A Cartesian Distinction in Virtue
Moral and Perfect

Frans Svensson

My aim in this chapter is threefold. First, to argue that Descartes in response to the question "How ought one to live?" offers a conception of what I shall call *moral virtue* (section 1). According to this conception, moral virtue is constituted by the correct use of free will. It is furthermore the only good or perfection that is up to us or in our own power: to what extent our lives will contain other goods or perfections is forever determined by God.

Second, to show that while moral virtue, in Descartes' view, is at least in practice necessary for obtaining happiness in one's life, it is not (either in theory or in practice) by itself sufficient for doing so (section 2). Moral virtue is sufficient for obtaining happiness only in conjunction with the knowledge that nothing in our lives, except for the use that we make of free will, could be otherwise, and that as long as one shows moral virtue in one's conduct there is therefore no respect in which one's life could be better or more perfect than it actually is.

Third, to explicate and defend the presence in Descartes' ethics of an important but generally overlooked distinction in virtue: between moral virtue on the one hand, and a second and more elevated form—*perfect virtue*, as I will call it—on the other. Perfect virtue is constituted by the combination of moral virtue and the knowledge that was seen to be required in order for moral virtue to be sufficient for happiness. In contrast to mere moral virtue, perfect virtue *is* thus sufficient for happiness. However, since the knowledge that is part of perfect virtue is not, according to Descartes, in our own power, perfect virtue does not constitute the proper end or goal for each individual to aim at in their conduct. I will defend the presence of the distinction between moral and perfect virtue in Descartes' ethics first indirectly by responding to a potential objection to the conception of moral virtue that I have been ascribing to Descartes in the earlier parts of the chapter (section 3), and secondly by offering two important pieces of text where I believe Descartes should plausibly be read as appealing to the distinction in question (section 4). The life of perfect virtue is then in turn distinguished from what Descartes calls the highest good "of the whole of human nature in general" (CSMK,

261; AT 4, 276), which is constituted by all the goods or perfections that human nature is susceptible to (section 5).[1] I will round off the chapter with a few general remarks concerning the results of the investigation (Concluding Remarks).

1. How Ought One to Live? Descartes' Conception of Moral Virtue

In Book I of Plato's *Republic*, we find Socrates telling Trasymachus: "The argument is not about an ordinary matter, but about how one ought to live" (352d5–6; see also e.g. *Gorgias* 487e7–488a2). Socrates' question—often regarded as the fundamental question of ethics—unsurprisingly plays an important role also in Descartes' ethical philosophy.[2] Descartes' answer to it is perhaps most succinctly put forward in his letter of 20 November 1647 to Queen Christina of Sweden (though similar formulations can be found also in letters to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and in *The Passions of the Soul*).[3] After having made clear that nothing but the use that we make of our free will is up to us, and that nothing therefore could be more important to us than to use that freedom well or correctly, Descartes writes that he does "not see that it is possible to dispose [the will] better than by a firm and constant resolution to carry out to the letter all the things which one judges to be best, and to employ all the powers of one's mind in finding out what these are" (CSMK, 325; AT 5, 83; see also e.g. CSMK, 257f; AT 4, 265; CSMK, 262; AT 4, 277; CSM 1, 191; AT 8A, 2f; CSM 1, 384; AT 11, 446).

Within Descartes' ethical framework, to dispose the will in the way just specified constitutes what I shall henceforth refer to as *moral virtue*. Descartes does not himself ever call it that. He refers instead simply to *virtue* (the letter to Christina indeed immediately continues with the claim that to dispose the will in the relevant way "by itself constitutes all the virtues" (CSMK, 325; AT 5, 83)). As I will argue later, however, there are (despite what he writes to Christina) strong grounds for ascribing to Descartes the view that there is also a second and more elevated form of virtue—*perfect virtue*, in the terminology that I will adopt—that is constituted by two different components: namely, the correct use of free will and, in addition, a certain amount of knowledge or wisdom.[4] Because of this, it will be helpful to have a distinct label for the slightly less elevated form of virtue specified in e.g. the letter to Christina from which I quoted above. Perhaps it will be asked, though, why I propose to call it *moral* virtue. Strictly speaking, it is merely a label and anyone should feel free to change it for another one if they so wish. But the use of *moral* in this context seems to me fitting. The reason for this is that this form of virtue, in contrast, as we shall see, to perfect virtue, is, in Descartes' picture, associated with an *ought* that is supposed to be applicable to each person and not just to a selected group of people in possession of special

knowledge. Each person ought to dispose their will well or correctly, and it must therefore also be within each person's own power to do so. Trying to live in a way that is *not* in one's own power "would be a waste of time" (CSMK, 257; AT 4, 265).

Moral virtue, according to Descartes, is one among several goods or perfections that human nature is susceptible to. Other human perfections include e.g. free will, health, knowledge, wealth, and loving, friendly, and more generally social relationships. Moral virtue stands out, however, in the respect that it is the only perfection that is up to us or in our own power (CSMK, 261; AT 4, 276; CSMK, 325; AT 5, 83). With respect to every other perfection that human nature is susceptible to, it is forever determined by divine Providence if and to what degree one will acquire it.[5] In the Cartesian picture, a morally virtuous life is therefore in fact guaranteed to be as good or perfect overall as it possibly can be. Such a life will exhibit both the one perfection that is in our own power, as well as whatever degrees of whatever other perfections that it is forever determined by divine Providence that the life in question will contain. Moral virtue therefore also constitutes what Descartes calls the highest good "of each individual" (CSMK, 324; AT 5, 82).[6] It is what each person ought to put up as the end or goal in all of their conduct (e.g. CSMK, 261; AT 4, 275), as well as the only thing for which we are praiseworthy (CSMK, 325; AT 5, 83; CSM 1, 384; AT 11, 446), and the only source of justified self-esteem (CSM 1, 384; AT 11, 445).

One thing in relation to what has been said so far that stands in need of qualification is the following. When pressed on the issue by Princess Elisabeth, Descartes concedes that there are certain conditions that can in fact prevent people's "will from being free" (CSMK, 262f; AT 4, 281), and thus also from the possibility of disposing free will well or badly. As I understand him, Descartes' view is that when suffering from such conditions, we do not qualify as fully moral beings. In particular, since there can then be no conduct that we are, as it were, ourselves ultimately the authors of, there will be no sense in which it could reasonably be said of us that we *ought* to live in one way rather in another. Still, when referring to moral virtue—and more generally to the use that we make of our free will—as being, in Descartes' view, up to us or in our own power, the qualification "granted that we have access to free will" will always be assumed in what follows.

Since we have only very limited cognitive powers, it is, with the exception of moral virtue, impossible for us as humans to know for certain what goods or perfections that we will actually obtain in our lives. But the goods or perfections besides moral virtue nevertheless provide us, in Descartes' view, with suitable objects for morally virtuous deliberation and choice or decision. Thus, the practice of moral virtue is a matter of, first, choosing to form the best judgments that we are individually capable of about what perfections that are relevant in our circumstances

and how we can most effectively promote our acquisition of them, and, second, making sure that we choose to act in accordance with our best judgments about these things.[7] As it stands, this leaves open for the possibility that we might be mistaken, through no fault of our own, not only about what perfections that are in fact present or relevant in our circumstances and about what to do to successfully acquire them, but also about whether something or other is really a human good or perfection at all. Descartes never makes it quite clear if he thinks that we can in fact ever be non-culpably mistaken in that last way. But if we can be so mistaken, it is quite clear that it would not affect the moral virtuousness of what we did. As he puts it in the letter to Christina:

> [Moral] virtue consists only in the resolution and vigour with which we are inclined to do the things we think good—this vigour, of course, must not stem from stubbornness, but from the knowledge that we have examined the matter as well as we are morally able. What we do after such examination may be bad, but none the less we can be sure of having done our duty.
>
> (CSMK, 325; AT 5, 83f; see also CSMK, 269; AT 4, 307)[8]

If "bad" in this quotation is supposed to allow for the possibility that we might indeed be mistaken even with respect to whether something or other is really a human perfection, then, assuming "that we have examined the matter as well as we are morally able", such a mistake would not affect the moral virtuousness of what we did.

But why, someone may ask, should it matter that we are—or at least do our best to be—concerned with these other goods or perfections in our deliberations and decisions or choices about what to do, if it is the case that whether we will acquire such goods or perfections is ultimately not up to ourselves but instead "determined from all eternity" by divine Providence (CSM 1, 380; AT 11, 438)? In response to this question, we must notice first of all that free will, according to Descartes, is an incredible power: it is, he writes, "itself the noblest thing we can have, since it makes us in a sense equal to God and exempt us from being His subjects" (CSMK, 326; AT 5, 85; see also e.g. CSM 1, 5; AT 10, 218; CSM 1, 205; AT 8A, 18f, and CSM 2, 39f; AT 7, 56ff). With great power, however, comes great responsibility. Each person who has access to free will is herself responsible for choosing to be concerned in her deliberations and decisions about what to do with things that are (or that she takes to be) fitting for creatures with specifically human nature. And even if we are not ultimately in control of what human perfections that our lives will indeed contain, choosing to be concerned with such perfections in our deliberations and decisions about what to do is itself a human perfection: it is an expression of living well as a human being, of getting on well as the

kind of creatures that we are. Since that is furthermore the one and only perfection whose presence in our lives we have been granted the freedom to determine for ourselves, nothing could be more important to us than to use this freedom well or correctly. This account also fits quite well with Descartes conception of the vice that he refers to as *lâcheté*, which is manifested by people who do *not* concern themselves enough with human goods or perfection to choose to first form the best judgments that they are capable of about these things, and then to act accordingly (CSM 1, 392; AT 11, 426f; see also CSM 1, 384; AT 11, 445).[9]

2. Moral Virtue and Happiness

As we have seen, a satisfactory answer to the question of how one ought to live, according to Descartes, must direct us towards something that is up to us or in our own power. The only thing that meets this condition, however, is the use that we make of our free will. And since it is better or more perfect to use the will well rather than badly—indeed, by disposing the will well, or in accordance with moral virtue, we are even guaranteed that our lives will be as good or perfect overall as they can possibly be—Descartes' answer to how one ought to live is: A life of moral virtue!

However, it is also a fact about us as humans, according to Descartes, that we want or desire to obtain happiness (see e.g. CSMK, 257; AT 4, 263). But what is happiness? And how is moral virtue related to obtaining it? Descartes is concerned with one or both of these questions—as well as with other closely related ones—in different places: perhaps especially in his correspondence with Princess Elisabeth from the summer and fall of 1645[10] and in *The Passions of the Soul* (which was to a great extent written as a result of his correspondence with Elisabeth), but also in e.g. the Dedicatory Letter to Princess Elisabeth in *The Principles of Philosophy*, the Preface to the French edition of that work, and in *Discourse on the Method*.[11] His general concern in these discussions, it should be noticed, is with happiness and how to obtain it *in this life*, rather than in the life after this one (if there is such a life).

By "happiness" Descartes intends "that supreme felicity" (CSMK, 256; AT 4, 252), which consists in a state of complete contentment and satisfaction with what one has and does (see e.g. CSMK, 257; AT 4, 264). This is perhaps not what people in general mean by happiness. But Descartes thinks it is the view of happiness that we reach if we just reflect or meditate properly on the matter. It is therefore also the view that I shall be assuming in what follows. The main threats to our happiness, according to Descartes, are constituted by desires for goods or perfections that are "entirely outside [one's] power" (CSMK, 258; AT 4, 266). Such desires give rise to negative emotions in us, i.e. to emotions such as frustration, anxiety, remorse, and repentance,[12] which upset or disrupt our contentment and satisfaction.

But how is moral virtue then related to obtaining happiness in our lives? According to the reading that I want to propose here, Descartes' answer to this question is as follows:

(a) Moral virtue is, at least in practice, necessary for obtaining happiness.
But:
(b) Moral virtue is not (either in theory or in practice) by itself sufficient for obtaining happiness.
Still:
(c) Moral virtue is sufficient for obtaining happiness *provided* that one also knows that nothing in one's life, besides the use that one makes of free will, could be otherwise, and that as long as one lives a morally virtuous life (i.e. disposes the will well or correctly) there is therefore no respect in which one's life could be better or more perfect than it is.

If this is correct, then one noteworthy implication is that even though moral virtue, in Descartes' view, guarantees that a person's life will be as good or perfect overall as that person's life can possibly be, there is no guarantee that the person will also obtain happiness in her life.

Let us now consider *(a)-(c)* in a bit more detail.

2.1 Why Moral Virtue Is (At Least in Practice) Necessary for Happiness

Why would moral virtue—i.e. to dispose the will "by a firm and constant resolution to carry out to the letter all the things which one judges to be best, and to employ all the powers of one's mind in finding out what these are"—be (at least in practice) necessary for obtaining happiness, according to Descartes? The answer is that for all practical purposes we must dispose the will well in order to protect ourselves from the kind of negative emotions that upset or disrupt our inner contentment and satisfaction. In the Cartesian picture, as hinted earlier, negative emotions arise in us as a result of desires for goods or perfections whose presence in our lives are forever determined by divine Providence, and that are thus "entirely outside [our] power". By desiring such goods or perfections, we are constantly open to feelings of frustration, sadness, resentment, and so on, in relation to all those goods or perfections that are not currently in our possession, as well as to feelings of concern or anxiety about the risk of losing the ones that we do indeed currently possess. To avoid being open to such emotions, we need to devote ourselves to goods or perfections that are in our own power. And since there is, in Descartes' view, only one such good or perfection, namely moral virtue, we need to devote ourselves to that.

The qualification "at least in practice" is still necessary here, however. The reason for this is that it is at least conceivable that someone who

does not use his will in accordance with moral virtue would have his every desire fulfilled while remaining, as Descartes puts it in a letter to Elisabeth, "so continually diverted" in his mind that he never quite perceives that he is not himself in control of this (letter of 6 October 1645; CSMK, 268; AT 4, 306). But even if this were to happen—something which I take it is really just a theoretical possibility, in Descartes' view—it would not, he writes, "amount to the enjoyment of the happiness" that he and Elisabeth "are discussing, since the latter must depend on our conduct, whereas the former could come only from fortune" (*ibid*.) And indeed, if we were to restrict ourselves to thinking about what we must do to obtain happiness as a result of our own conduct, and not only from fortune—or, strictly speaking, from divine Providence—then it seems moral virtue would really be necessary for happiness. But that does not change the fact that moral virtue is not unqualifiedly necessary for happiness, in the Cartesian picture.

2.2 Why Moral Virtue Is Not Sufficient for Happiness

Let us turn then instead to why moral virtue, on my reading of Descartes, is not by itself sufficient for obtaining happiness. The answer is, in short, that moral virtue is compatible with ignorance about in what respects one's life could be better or more perfect than it actually is. It seems quite possible for someone to have committed himself to disposing his will in a morally virtuous way, while he at the same time remains convinced that there are several respects in which his life could be better or more perfect than it actually is. He might remain convinced e.g. that he could have received a better upbringing, a better education, belonged to a more wealthy and noble family, as well as that he could be more healthy, more beautiful, and less lonely than he is, even though he shows "a firm and constant resolution to carry out to the letter all the things which [he] judges to be best, and [employs] all the powers of [his] mind in finding out what these are". Happiness, according to Descartes, would escape such a person, not because of the person's lack of moral virtue (the person does *not* lack moral virtue!), but because of his convictions about the respects in which his life does not exhibit as much perfection as it could do. These convictions will give rise to negative emotions in him that will prevent him from being entirely content and satisfied inside with that he has and does.[13]

Even though the person just described cannot see it for himself, his life is, in Descartes' view, as good or perfect overall as it possibly can be. The person is mistaken in his convictions that there are respects in which his life could be even better or more perfect than it actually is: if his life was indeed more perfect in some respect, then it would not be *his* life at all. As long as he is morally virtuous, there is no respect in which his life could be better or more perfect than it is since, with the exception of moral

virtue, it is "determined from all eternity" what perfections (and to what degrees) his life will contain. But as long as the person remains ignorant about this, his life will not, despite its moral virtuousness, be happy. And thus moral virtue is not by itself sufficient for happiness.

2.3 What Else Is Needed?

If moral virtue, according to Descartes, is indeed in practice necessary for obtaining happiness in this life, yet not quite sufficient for doing so, then what else, besides moral virtue, is needed? Not a whole lot, I think. What is needed is really just the knowledge that nothing in our lives but the use that we make of our free will could be otherwise, and that as long as we use free will well or correctly there is therefore no respect in which our lives could be better or more perfect than they are. Moral virtue in combination with this knowledge will ensure that one does not have desires for things that are "entirely outside [one's] control", no matter how good we judge them to be. Such desires will then seem just as alien to us as e.g. desires for "more arms or more tongues than we have" (CSMK, 258; AT 4, 266).[14] And because of this we will also be properly protected against emotions of the kind that upset our inner contentment and satisfaction with what we have and what we do.

It should be noticed that the knowledge in question here is not, as it were, inhuman (or divine rather than human): in particular, it does not involve knowledge about the actual outcomes of what we do, or about all the particulars of the situations that we find ourselves in. It is, once again, really just the knowledge that with the exception of the practice of free will, nothing in our lives could be different from what it is, and that the good or correct use of free will therefore guarantees that one's life will be as good or perfect overall as it can possibly be it is quite clear that Descartes thinks that there are people who indeed have this knowledge and in so far as these people dispose their will well or correctly they will live happily. Furthermore, there is no indication that Descartes thinks that the great majority of people, if they were given the requisite time and the right teachers, would not be able to acquire the relevant knowledge. On the contrary, we may plausibly read *The Passions of the Soul* as an attempt to contribute to such teaching. Of course, which particular persons that will in fact acquire the relevant knowledge, whether they receive the necessary education or not, is forever determined by divine Providence. But even though we cannot know for sure what the outcome will be, we can still do our best to spread the knowledge.

3. From Moral to Perfect Virtue

Someone might perhaps want to object at this point that we cannot plausibly distinguish in Descartes' ethics between what I have called moral

virtue, and, in short, knowledge about in what respects our lives could be better or more perfect than they are. On the reading of Descartes that I have proposed so far, moral virtue is compatible with having "vain desires"—i.e. with having desires for goods or perfections the possession of which is not up to us but rather "determined from all eternity" by divine Providence (CSM 1, 380; AT 11, 438). But is not that a quite odd result? How could anyone who is ignorant about the respects in which her life could be better or more perfect than it is, according to Descartes, at the same time be thought of as disposing her will *well* or *correctly*? Such a person will in part be using her will to affirm false judgments about what is possible, judgments that will then give rise to vain desires. But, again, how could that ever amount to using one's will well or correctly? Should we not rather say that the knowledge that nothing in one's life but the use of free will could be otherwise, and that as long as one is disposing the will well, there will, therefore, be no respect in which one's life could be better or more perfect than it actually is, must, in Descartes' view, be partly constitutive of moral virtue? And in the light of this also that moral virtue is really by itself sufficient for obtaining happiness?[15]

In response to this, I should first of all want to say that no, I do not find it an odd result of my proposed reading that moral virtue is, in the Cartesian picture, compatible with having vain desires. We should recall from the first section that moral virtue constitutes "the highest good of each individual". To dispose the will well or correctly is supposed to be in each person's own power, whereas our possession of other goods or perfections—including the good of knowing that nothing in our lives except for the practice of free will could be otherwise, and that our lives therefore could not be better or more perfect than they actually are as long as we show moral virtue in our conduct—is forever determined by divine Providence.[16] Precisely because of this, there is nothing strange or odd about the possibility of people who dispose their will well or correctly, while at the same time holding vain desires. Their ignorance about what could and could not be otherwise in their lives is not blameworthy or anything that detracts from their moral virtue (if they have such virtue) since it is not something they are responsible for.[17]

However, on my reading there is indeed an important ethical difference, in Descartes' picture, between a life of, as it were, *mere* moral virtue, and a life of moral virtue that is also informed by the knowledge that besides the use of free will nothing in our lives could be otherwise, and so as long as one uses free will well or correctly there is no respect in which one's life could be better or more perfect than it is. Even if the latter, according to Descartes, does not constitute a suitable answer to how each person ought to live, it still constitutes a more perfect and awe-inspiring way of getting on in life for humans than the former since it will not contain any vain desires, and thus neither any negative emotions such

as frustration, anxiety, regret, or remorse. The way in which Descartes marks this important difference, I now want to suggest, is by appealing to an interesting but all too often overlooked distinction between two forms of virtue: moral virtue on the one hand, and a second and more elevated form—*perfect virtue*, as I propose to call it (though as we shall see, it could equally well be called *wisdom* or *generosity*)—on the other. In contrast to mere moral virtue, perfect virtue is indeed constituted by the combination of the good or correct use of free will and the knowledge mentioned just above. And in the light of what was argued in section 2, this also means that perfect virtue is sufficient for obtaining happiness in this life.

4. Textual Support for the Distinction

There are in particular two important passages where Descartes can plausibly be read as appealing to a distinction of the kind that I have just indicated.

4.1 The Dedicatory Letter to Princess Elisabeth

The strongest support for ascribing the proposed distinction to Descartes is found in the short Dedicatory Letter to Princess Elisabeth in *The Principles of Philosophy*. Descartes there refers to the existence of what he calls "pure and genuine virtues, which proceed solely from knowledge of what is right" and that can all be subsumed "under the single term 'wisdom'" (CSM 1, 191; AT 8A, 2). The "truly wise" person is someone who "possesses the firm and powerful resolve always to use his reasoning powers correctly, as far as he can, and to carry out whatever he knows to be best" (ibid.). Just a few lines down in the letter, Descartes then writes:

> Now there are two prerequisites for the kind of wisdom just described, namely the perception of the intellect and the disposition of the will. But whereas what depends on the will is within the capacity of everyone, there are some people who possess far sharper intellectual vision than others. Those who are by nature somewhat backward intellectually should make a firm and faithful resolution to do their utmost to acquire knowledge of what is right, and always to pursue what they judge to be right; this should suffice to enable them, despite their ignorance on many points, to achieve wisdom according to their lights and thus to find great favour with God. Nevertheless they will be far left behind by those who possess not merely a very firm resolve to act rightly but also the sharpest intelligence combined with the utmost zeal for acquiring knowledge of the truth.
>
> (CSM 1, 191; AT 8A, 3)

Here I believe Descartes is fairly clearly trying to distinguish between the perfectly virtuous—or the truly wise—and the merely morally virtuous. The perfectly virtuous dispose their will in such a way that they always choose to first form, and then to act in accordance with, the best judgments that they are capable of about what it would be best to do in the circumstances. And they do so *knowing* that to dispose the will in that way is what is right—that *that* is the right way to live. How do they know this? As a result, I submit, of their knowledge that nothing in their lives but the use of free will could be otherwise, and that their lives are therefore guaranteed to be as good or perfect overall as they can possibly be as long as they dispose their will well or correctly. The merely morally virtuous also use their will in such a way that they choose to first form, and then to act in accordance with, the best judgments that they are capable of about what it would be best to do in the circumstances. But they do so *not* from the knowledge that that itself is what is right, but instead as part of an aspiration to find out what is right. Since the merely morally virtuous mistakenly believe that their lives could be even better or more perfect overall than what they actually are, they choose to form, and then to act in accordance with, the best judgments that they are capable of as a part of an ongoing attempt to acquire ever more perfections through their conduct.

Descartes clearly thinks that wisdom, or perfect virtue, constitutes a greater human perfection than mere moral virtue: to show perfect virtue in one's conduct is a better or more perfect way of getting on in life for humans than what showing merely moral virtue in one's conduct is. But since perfect virtue, just as every other human perfection besides moral virtue, is not completely up to us or in our own power, it does not constitute the highest good "of each individual": it is not fitting as the object that each person ought to put up as the end or goal in all of their conduct.

4.2 The Definition of Generosity

Secondly, I should like to draw attention to certain aspects of Descartes' discussion of *generosity* in part 3 of *The Passions of the Soul*. Generosity, he says, is itself a virtue (e.g. CSM 1, 388; AT 11, 454). In his definition of it, Descartes furthermore makes it clear that he thinks generosity is constituted by two different components: one cognitive and one volitional. More specifically, generosity is constituted by, firstly, a person's "knowing that nothing truly belongs to him but [the] freedom to dispose his volitions, and that he ought to be praised and blamed for no other reason than by his using this freedom well or badly"; and, secondly, "in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best" (CMS 1, 384; AT 11, 446). He then also adds: "To do that is to pursue virtue in a perfect manner" (ibid.).

What Descartes is suggesting here, I believe, is that to dispose the will well—i.e. to show "a firm and constant resolution . . . to undertake and carry out whatever [one] judges to be best"—*in conjunction* with the knowledge that "nothing truly belongs to [one] but [the] freedom to dispose [one's] volitions . . . well or badly", which, as I understand it, is meant to entail the knowledge that whether one is using one's volitions well or badly is the only respect in which the quality of one's life is not forever determined, is to manifest generosity or perfect virtue. But this must be distinguished from the less perfect form of virtue—from moral virtue, as I have called it—that Descartes, as we have seen, in letters to Queen Christina and Princess Elisabeth argues is constituted merely by the good or correct use of the will. And precisely because generosity comprises not only the perfection of disposing the will well, but also the perfection of knowing in what respects our lives could be better or more perfect than they are, it constitutes a greater human perfection than merely moral virtue. But as in the case of wisdom earlier (to which it largely corresponds), generosity is not in each person's own power, and it therefore does not constitute the proper end or goal for each person to aim at in all of their conduct.

5. Morality, Perfect Virtue, and the Highest Good of the Whole of Human Nature in General

On the assumption that there is a Cartesian distinction between moral and perfect virtue, understood along the lines that I have suggested, it should be clear that perfect virtue, in Descartes' view, constitutes a greater human good or perfection than mere moral virtue. Perfect virtue guarantees that as far as our choices and affections are concerned, they will be as perfect as they can be in the case of humans. Since it contains moral virtue as one of its components, perfect virtue to begin with guarantees that one will always choose to act as one ought—i.e. by showing "a firm and constant resolution to carry out to the letter all the thing which one judges to be best, and to employ all the powers of one's mind in finding out what these are". And due to its second cognitive component, perfect virtue guarantees that one will never hold any vain desires, and therefore neither suffer from the kind of negative emotions that are usually associated with such desires, which is why perfect (but not moral) virtue also guarantees that one will live happily. But since perfect virtue is not quite up to us, it cannot, according to Descartes, constitute the highest good of each individual—that which each person ought to aim at in all of their conduct.

It deserves to be noticed, however, that perfect virtue neither entails nor is identical to what Descartes refers to as the highest good "of the whole of human nature in general" (CSMK, 261; AT 4, 276), or, in another passage, the highest good "of all men together" (CSMK,

324; AT 5, 82). The latter is an inclusive good, consisting "of all the perfections of which human nature is capable" (CSMK, 261; AT 4, 276). While two persons who are both in possession of perfect virtue will get on in an equally perfect manner regarding their conduct, one of them may enjoy many more human goods or perfections than the other, and thus be at least closer to exhibiting the highest good "of the whole of human nature in general" in her life. They will both be completely content and satisfied inside with what they have and with what they do, though, since they both know that their lives (due to their possession of moral virtue) are as good or perfect overall as they can possibly be.

6. Concluding Remarks

The distinction between moral and perfect virtue can perhaps be said to place Descartes with one foot in the classical tradition of ethics, but with the other instead in the modern tradition that includes e.g. Kant and the early utilitarians. With the ancients, Descartes shares the ambition of presenting an account of what it means to get on in life in the best way that is conceivable for humans—an ideal of a perfectly virtuous (or wise or generous) life, which entails happiness and that is worth aspiring towards even if only certain people will ever be able to actually conform to it in their lives. But as most ethicists in the modern tradition, Descartes is concerned also to provide an account of how we ought to live that is applicable in the same way to each person (assuming, at least, that they have access to free will), independently of our differences in upbringing, education, intelligence, and amount of knowledge. In Descartes' account of how we ought to live, what matters is that we use our free will well or correctly. Even though such a life, in Descartes' view, is guaranteed to be as good or perfect overall as it possibly can be in the case of the person whose life it is, it will not necessarily be a life of perfect virtue. And as virtually all moral philosophers in the modern tradition would agree, neither will a life of merely moral virtue, according to Descartes, by itself be sufficient for happiness. As we saw in the final section of the chapter, however, getting on in a perfectly virtuous way does not, in the Cartesian picture, in any way entail that one's life will manifest the highest good "of the whole of human nature in general". The latter is constituted not only by moral virtue and the knowledge that with the exception of how we use our free will, everything is forever determined by divine Providence and thus beyond our power to do anything about, but instead by the totality of all the goods or perfections that human nature is in general susceptible to. Presumably no individual human being will ever actually acquire that good, according to Descartes.[18]

Notes

1 Throughout the text, I will use the following abbreviations of sources: CSM: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (2 vols.), translated by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; CSMK: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, translated by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, and A. Kenny, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; and AT: *Oevures de Descartes* (12 vols.), edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery, rev. ed. Paris: VRIN/CNRS, 1964–76.

2 Interest in Descartes' ethics has been steadily increasing in recent scholarship; see e.g. Alanen 2003, ch. 7, 2009, and her contribution to the present volume; Amatayakul 2014; Brown 2006, especially ch. 6–8; Cottingham 1996, 1998; Frierson 2002; Guéroult 1985; Kambouchner 2009; Marshall 1998; Morgan 1994; Naaman-Zauderer 2010, 2018; Calvin Normore's contribution to this volume; Pereboom 1994; Rodis-Lewis 1970; Rutherford 2004, 2014, 2003/2017; Santilli 1992; Shapiro 1999, 2007; Sorell 1993; Svensson 2010, 2011, 2015; Viljanen Forthcoming; Wienand 2006, 2012; Williston 2003; Youpa 2013.

3 The letter to Christina was written in response to a request from the Queen to learn about his "view of the supreme good understood in the sense of the ancient philosophers" (CSMK, 324; AT 5, 81f). Descartes also forwarded copies of some of the letters on ethics that he had written originally to Princess Elisabeth in 1645 for the Queen to read, as well as a draft version of *The Passions of the Soul*.

4 As I will emphasize in later sections, the knowledge (or wisdom) required for perfect virtue is not, in Descartes' view, particularly comprehensive or demanding. What is required is really just the knowledge that nothing in our lives, besides the use that we make of our free will, can be otherwise, and that as long as we dispose our free will well or correctly, there is therefore no respect in which our lives could be better or more perfect than they actually are. It is thus quite different from the kind of wisdom that Descartes is primarily concerned with in e.g. the Preface to the French edition of *The Principles of Philosophy*, which is said to encompass "not only prudence in our everyday affairs but also a perfect knowledge of all things that mankind is capable of knowing" (CSM 1, 179; AT 8A, 2).

5 With the exception of how we use our free will, "nothing can possibly happen other than as Providence has determined from all eternity. Providence is, so to speak, a fate or immutable necessity, which we must set against Fortune in order to expose the latter as a chimera which arises solely from an error of our intellect" (CSM 1, 380; AT 11, 438). See also e.g. CSMK, 265; AT 4, 291, and CSM 1, 206; AT8A, 20.

6 In the aforementioned letter to Queen Christina, Descartes distinguishes between *(a)* the highest good "of each individual", *(b)* the highest good "of all men together", which he says is constituted by "the total or aggregate of all the goods" that human nature is susceptible to, and *(c)* the highest good "considered in itself without reference to anything else", which is constituted by God (CSMK, 324; AT 5, 82). I will return to *(b)* in section 5 in this chapter. Elsewhere I argue that we can in fact distinguish between at least four other senses of the highest good in Descartes' ethics, corresponding to four other things that Descartes in various places refers to as constituting the highest good (namely supernatural beatitude, free will, love of God, and wisdom); see Svensson (forthcoming).

7 Following Marshall 1998, 117, we might thus think of Cartesian virtue a *second-order* good, which consists in responding well to other, *first-order*

goods. For an interesting contemporary account of virtue as a second-order good, see Hurka 2001.

8 In the Fourth Mediation, Descartes also writes that "[a]s far as the conduct of life is concerned, I am far from thinking that we should assent only to what is clearly perceived. On the contrary, I do not think we should always expect even probable truths" (CSM 2, 106; AT 7, 149; see also CSM 1, 193; AT 8A, 5). For further discussion of how the limits of our intellectual powers matter in Descartes' ethics, see e.g. Shapiro 1999, 263–69

9 It is quite difficult to find an apt English translation of *lâcheté*. E.g. *timidity* and *laziness* have been used in translations of *The Passions of the Soul*, but neither seems quite accurate.

10 It may be noticed that the immediate reason for the discussion about virtue and happiness in their correspondence at this time, is that Elisabeth is suffering from what appears to be some form of depression. It is his "wish to see her enjoy all the happiness and contentment that she deserves" that makes Descartes suggest, as a means to provide some distraction and entertainment to Elisabeth, that they together read and discuss Seneca's *On the Happy Life* (CSMK, 256; AT 4, 252f). Descartes very soon grows impatient with Seneca's work, however, and starts to present his own views on the matter.

11 The *Discourse* contains Descartes' famous *moral par provision*, "consisting of just three or four maxims" that he decided to follow during the time of his radical doubt "in order to live as happily as [he] could" (CSM 1, 122; AT 4, 22).

12 In *The Passions of the Soul* (article 177), Descartes draws a distinction between *remorse* and *repentance*. Both, he suggests, are kinds of *sadness* (one of the primitive passions), but whereas remorse is what we feel when we *suspect* that we have not been acting well (or when we are "doubting that something we are doing, or have done, is good" (CSM 1, 392; AT 11, 464)), *repentance* is instead what we feel when we are certain that we have done something bad.

13 What has just been said might, it seems to me, very well be true of many people belonging to the majority who, in Descartes' view, fail to obtain happiness in their lives. The reason they fail to obtain happiness, Descartes argues, is their ignorance about in what respects their lives could be better or more perfect than they actually are. He never quite suggests that they all fail to live as they ought to—i.e. that they fail to live morally virtuous lives.

14 Cf. CSM 1, 124; AT 6, 25f: "our will naturally tends to desire only what our intellect represents to it as somehow possible; and so it is certain that if we consider all external goods as equally beyond our power, we shall not regret them the absence of goods which seem to be our birthright when we are deprived of them through no fault of our own, any more than we regret not possessing the kingdom of China or Mexico. Making a virtue of necessity, as they say, we shall not desire to be healthy when ill or free when imprisoned, any more than we now desire to have bodies of a material as indestructible as diamond or wings to fly like birds".

15 Several scholars (including earlier versions of myself) have indeed argued that virtue, according to Descartes, is sufficient for obtaining happiness; see e.g. Rutherford 2004, 2015, 2003/2017; Svensson 2011, 2015; Youpa 2013. One virtue, it seems to me, of the interpretation developed in the present chapter is that it can in a sense accommodate both that view and the view of scholars such as Alanen 2009; Viljanen forthcoming who have offered compelling grounds for thinking that virtue, in Descartes' view, is not quite sufficient for happiness. On the present interpretation, the latter view is, in Descartes' picture, correct with respect to *moral* virtue, whereas the former view is correct instead with respect to what I below shall call *perfect* virtue (which includes moral virtue as one of its components).

16 That knowledge is often beyond our power is something that Descartes points out in various places; for just two examples of this, see CSMK, 325; AT 5, 83, and CSM 1, 191; AT 8A, 3. Maybe it can be argued that there is at least *some* knowledge that each person can in some sense be said to have. But the knowledge that nothing but the use of free will could be otherwise, and that as long as one uses free will well or correctly there will therefore be no respect in which one's life could be better or more perfect than it is, would clearly not be an example of such knowledge in Descartes' view.

17 See e.g. CSM 1, 384; AT 11, 445: "We can reasonably be praised or blamed *only* for actions that depend upon this free will" (emphasis added). For my own part, I am in fact inclined to think that moral virtue, in Descartes' conception of it, does not even require the knowledge that one has a free will. As far as I can tell, it should be perfectly possible for someone who is ignorant about this to choose to dispose her will "by a firm and constant resolution to carry out to the letter all the things which one judges to be best, and to employ all the powers of one's mind in finding out what these are" (though if she does, she will presumably do so (mistakenly) thinking that she could not have chosen to dispose it otherwise). However, since the interpretation that I develop in the present chapter does not depend on this being the case, I will not pursue it further here.

18 For comments and criticisms on earlier versions of this chapter, I am grateful to audiences in Turku, Helsinki, Dublin, and San Diego. In particular, I wish to thank Deborah Brown (who was my commentator at the *Pacific APA* in San Diego, 2018), John Carriero, Peter Myrdal, and Calvin Normore. My greatest debts, however, are due to Lilli Alanen and Martina Reuter, who both took the time to go through the chapter with me in quite some detail. While I am sure I am not even close to satisfying the demands of either of them, I am immensely grateful for their help.

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14 Spinoza and the Cartesian Definition of Love

Denis Kambouchner

In this chapter I would like to discuss the often alleged contrast between Spinoza's definition of love in the *Ethics* and Descartes' definition in *The Passions of the Soul*. Even nowadays, we find a number of scholars, principally on the Spinozan side, who persist in thinking that the philosophical differences between Descartes and Spinoza are more salient and significant than the similarities. According to this view, the same contrast to Descartes that Spinoza himself emphasizes with respect to two or three major metaphysical questions, such as the nature of God, the relation between mind and body, and the reality of the human free will, can also be recognized about all sorts of topics and conceptual details, so that it constitutes a sort of general law for the comparison between the two philosophers.

Of course, it would make no sense to ignore those ontological divergences, which are properly axiomatic; and it would make no sense either to present Descartes as Spinoza's major source of inspiration. Nevertheless, it is not at all impossible that we find, within two different philosophical frameworks, at least some very similar or related positions. And therefore, a good experiment or exercise may consist in trying to bring together, as far as possible, a certain number of statements which seem to belong to two basically different conceptions.

This is, for instance, what Lilli Alanen does in a recent paper (Alanen 2016) when she, following a suggestion of Yitzhak Melamed, finds in Spinoza's account of the intellectual love for God certain features of the Cartesian *acquiescentia in se ipso*. But as for Spinoza's definition of love in general, if she begins by calling it an "intriguing example of [his] debt to Descartes" (Alanen 2016, 74), her account rather highlights a basic difference between Spinoza's definition and the one offered by Descartes, namely the contrast between the judgment which unites us by will to an object and the joy caused in ourselves by the presence of the object. My question here will be: could not the relation between the two definitions be closer than it seems at first sight?

1. Questions of Words

According to Spinoza, "Love is a joy, with the accompanying idea of an external cause" (E3P13S). Of this definition, he says (*Ethics*, Part 3, Explanation of Definition 6 of the Affects) that it "explains the essence of love clearly enough" (*satis clare amoris essentiam explicat*). And he adds:

> But the definition of those authors who define *love* as *a will of the lover to join himself to the thing loved* [*voluntas amantis se jungendi rei amatae*], expresses a property of love, not its essence. And because these authors did not see clearly enough the essence of love, they could not have any clear concept of this property. Hence everyone has judged their definition quite obscure.
>
> (Curley, 533)[1]

He continues:

> But it should be noted that when I say it is a property in the lover, that he joins himself to the thing loved [*se voluntate jungere rei amatae*], I do not understand by will a consent, or a deliberation of the mind, *or* free decision (for we have demonstrated that this is a fiction in 2P48) nor do I understand a desire of joining oneself to the thing loved when it is absent or continuing in its presence when it is present [*cupiditas sese jungendi rei amatae, quando abest, vel perseverandi in ipsius praesentia, quando adest*]; for love can be conceived without either of these desires. Rather, by will I understand a satisfaction in the lover on account of the presence of the thing loved, by which the lover's joy is strengthened or at least encouraged.
>
> (*Ibid*.)

The question is whether all these statements refer to Descartes' definition of love in art. 79 of *The Passions of the Soul*:[2] "Love is an emotion of the soul, caused by the motion of the [animal] spirits, which incites it to join itself in volition to the objects that appear to be suitable to it".[3] And this is a quite complicated question, because Spinoza's text is very intricate and somehow wily if not dissembling.

First of all, we have to make a distinction here that Spinoza does not mark, between the *desire* or *will* to join oneself, *voluntas se jungendi*, to the thing loved, and the act of joining oneself in volition to this thing, *se voluntate jungere rei amatae*.[4] The basic difference is that when one joins oneself in volition to an object, by definition this union is actual; in contrast, when one wills to join oneself to the object, it is not, or not considered as such.

The words: *se voluntate jungere rei amatae* are actually taken from *The Passions of the Soul* (art. 79), in the Latin translation of 1650; they

correspond to the French: "se joindre de volonté à la chose aimée". As for the expression: "to will to join oneself to the thing loved", it is basically ambiguous and *not* literally Cartesian. In art. 81 of *The Passions*, Descartes makes a strict distinction between "joining oneself in volition" to some object and "to be associated with it in some other manner than in volition" (AT 11, 388):[5] it is of high importance that this distinction be respected.

Of course, from a Cartesian point of view, to join oneself in volition to the object implies a sort of will, namely, the approval of this junction and the will to maintain it. In the definition of hatred, we actually find the expression: *to will to be separated from the objects*: "Hatred is an emotion [. . .] which incites the soul to will to be separated from the objects that are presented to it as harmful" (AT 11, 387; Voss, 62).[6] This is the case insofar as Cartesian hatred is characterized by a single intention, which is: to have no relationship at all with the object one hates, even in thought. But if we pay close attention to this expression, we will find in it the paradox and misfortune of every instance of hatred: the object from which we will to be separated remains present to our mind, and in fact we never find ourselves *separated enough* from it. The same kind of dissatisfaction, related to the union (i.e.: not to find oneself *joined enough* to the thing loved), may of course be found in several forms of love, but not in all of them. For instance (art. 82), "a good father's love for his children is so pure that he desires to have nothing from them, and wills neither to possess them otherwise than he does, nor to be joined to them more closely than he already is" (AT 11, 389; Voss, 63).

What happens then when one renders the Latin text *proprietatem esse in amante, se voluntate jungere rei amatae*, by *a property in the lover, that he* ***wills*** *to join himself to the thing love* (as Edwin Curley does in his invaluable translation of the *Ethics*)? The result is a misreading which relates not only to the Spinozan text but also to the Cartesian definition of love. And this misreading is predetermined to a high degree, for this pseudo-Cartesian definition is strangely close to a Neoplatonic one. As a matter of fact, it is not Descartes who states that the will or desire to join oneself to the object constitutes the essence of love. Instead, such a view can be found in Leo Hebrew (Juda Abravanel or Abrabanel)—an author who seems to have been for the young Spinoza a direct source of inspiration, with his famous *Dialoghi d'amore* (Roma, 1535 numerous editions translated into Latin, 1564, into French 1551, into Spanish, 1568).[7] According to Leo Hebrew,

> The perfect union [. . .] is the true end of love and desire [. . .], so that one can define love as a desire to enjoy in union the thing which is known as good (*desiderio di godere con unione la cosa conosciuta per buona*), or [. . .] as a desire to be converted by union in the thing loved (*desiderio di convertirsi con unione ne la cosa amata*).
>
> (Leo Ebreo 2006, 104, 106; my translation)

Let us clarify this point: if *voluntas se jungendi* would mean *to want to join oneself to the thing loved in some other manner than in volition*, what Spinoza says would be quite the same as what Descartes does. Descartes himself insists on this point in art. 81. The will or desire to be associated with the object in some other manner is just an effect of love and not its essence: "If we judge it to be a good to possess [the object] or to be associated with it in some other manner than in volition, we desire it—which is [like benevolence] one of the most common effects of love" (AT 11, 388; Voss, 63).

But besides, Spinoza seems to say, undoubtedly against Descartes, that *se jungere voluntate* (*to join oneself in volition to the thing loved*) is a consequence of love and not its essence. There is room here for two comments:

1. If Spinoza has in mind Descartes's definition of love, he brings into this *junction* or *union in volition* some additional conditions, and pays no attention to what Descartes considers its specific nature. According to Spinoza, this union in volition does not only imply a consent but also a deliberation, a free decision and a clear desire (of the presence of the object). Of course, Descartes had spoken of a consent (art. 80):

   > By the phrase "in volition", I do not intend here to speak of desire, which is a passion by itself and has reference to the future, but of the consent by which we consider ourselves from the present as joined with what we love (*consensum, per quem nos consideramus ceu jam junctos rei amatae*), in such a way that we imagine a whole (*en sorte qu'on imagine un tout, concepto quodam veluti toto*), of which we think ourselves to be only one part and the thing loved another (AT 11, 387; Voss, 62).

But Descartes did not speak of any deliberation, nor of any free decision, nor of the will to make the object of love actually present.[8]

As for the consent, there is something puzzling in Descartes' text: he actually speaks of a will, but this will does not express itself in a determined volition. Rather, the core fact in Cartesian love is the persistence of a representation (*conceptus* in the Latin translation of *The Passions*, but *imagination* in the French text): the imagination of the whole we consider that we already form with the object. The consent in question is therefore in the first place a consent to an imagination, and in the second place a consent to anything which will appear good for the thing loved, or for the whole one forms with it—this being the reason why e.g. benevolence is called an effect of love by Descartes.

This consent, as such, is not therefore a mere volition presently produced in the soul. It is rather the approval of a certain state of the mind, which is already settled or rooted in it: "By the phrase 'in volition', I [. . .]

intend here to speak [. . .] of the consent by which we consider ourselves *from the present* as joined with what we love" (AT 11, 387; Voss, 62).[9] This has much to do with the recognition of a specific satisfaction, *acquiescentia*. In love, we acquiesce in the representation of our union to the thing loved in a whole, and delight in it.

2. According to Spinoza, to join oneself by volition to the thing loved is a property of the lover, but does not constitute the essence of love. Is this so contrary to what Descartes has in mind?

Descartes actually says (art. 81) that benevolence and concupiscence are just effects of love and do not pertain to its essence. But what is the essence of love made up of? We shall repeat: the essence of love consists in joining oneself by volition, etc. Nevertheless, this is not quite clear, for we are forgetting the first part of the definition: love is an emotion of the soul, *caused by the motion of the spirits* (the animal spirits, the "liveliest and finest parts of blood" (art. 10; AT 11, 334; Voss, 23), which incites the soul to join itself by volition to the thing loved.

So, this union by volition, which generates benevolence or concupiscence, is itself a kind of effect of love, that is, of the passion of love, taken as the emotion of the heart and of the spirits in which the corporeal nature of the passion consists. I say *a kind of effect*, because the Cartesian definition implies that the soul would be able, absolutely speaking, to withhold its consent. In this respect, the only cause of the consent is the soul itself with the self-determination of the will. I will resume this point below. But about what constitutes the essence of love from a Cartesian point of view, there is room for some hesitation: is it the union by volition itself, or is it the kind of impulse or impetus that receives in this union—this is to say, in the consent to a certain imagination—its full expression and legitimization?

The answer is that the union in volition to an object properly constitutes the essence of *intellectual love*, i.e. the kind of love that is excited in the soul by its own judgments. As for the *passion of love*, which in the letter to Chanut of February 1, 1647 is called "sensual or sensuous" love ("l'amour sensuelle ou sensitive", AT 4, 602; CSMK, 306), insofar as it is internal to the soul, its nature consists in an emotion that has a physiological character as well as a dynamic one. The soul feels itself incited, driven to a certain internal act, and then maybe to an external one.

If the emotion of the body, if the physiological process that causes this emotion in the soul is basically describable (this description being one of the main concerns of the Cartesian treatise), maybe the emotion of the soul itself will not be. And this is why this emotion will be defined in first place *by its effect*, this is to say, by the kind of representation and judgment it excites in the soul.

So, the essence of the passion of love is defined by what is in fact its effect, and even a sort of conditional one, if the soul may refuse the kind of thought or of stand the body leads it to take on.

If the *acquiescentia*, the kind of satisfaction Spinoza considers as an effect of love, is not at all contingent, but on the contrary always present, in contrast with the "desire of joining oneself to the thing loved when it is absent or continuing in its presence when it is present", the only difference between the two authors will be that for Descartes a definition by the effect is quite valid, while Spinoza demands a definition by the cause.

2. Ground Problems

Despite Spinoza's polemical intention, shall we then speak of a basic agreement between the two authors? Not yet, because there remains here two other problems:

(1) In Spinoza too, we find a distinction between love as a passion and intellectual love. But this distinction relates to two different states and regulations of affective, ethical and intellectual life, so that these two affects are incompatible. In Descartes, we find instead a close connection and consecutiveness between the passion of love and intellectual love, which is set out especially in the letter to Chanut. Consequently, we can speak of an absolute character of the Spinozan affects, which contrast with the permanent possibility—in the Cartesian context—of a tension or a phase difference inner to the soul, for instance between what the soul feels "in [its] innermost depths" (*Passions*, art. 147: "dans son plus intérieur"; AT 11, 441; Voss, 101), and what it feels "on the outside and in the senses", (art. 187: "dans l'extérieur et dans le sens"; AT 11, 470; Voss, 120). How could then Cartesian and Spinozan love constitute the same sort of affect?

(2) Spinoza assimilates love to a form of joy, while Descartes considers love and joy as two different, and even primitive, passions, something which seems to mean that they are not derivable from each other. How could we then identify Cartesian love with a Spinozan joy?

(1) It does not seem to me so difficult to answer the first question. Of course, we have to distinguish between the two forms of love, but under normal circumstances those two forms are two moments of a single process and two aspects of a single phenomenon.

"Commonly", Descartes says in his letter to Chanut, "these two loves occur together" (AT 4, 603; CSMK, 307). These two follow each other very closely: either the thought of love, conceived only by the soul, makes an impression in the brain that triggers the physiological process corresponding to the passion of love; or this passion, which is a "confused

thought aroused in the soul by some motion of the nerves, [. . .] makes it disposed to have the other, clearer, thought which constitutes rational love" (AT 4, 602f; CSMK, 306). And this connection or succession is remarkable from more than one point of view: it means in particular that despite his occasional reference (e.g. Part IV, art. 190, in *The Principles of Philosophy*; AT 8A, 316f; CSM 1, 280f), to the "good affections" (*eupatheiai*) that the Stoics distinguished from passions in general, "intellectual love" *is not necessarily rational in the strictest sense of the term*. I want to insist on this point which is often misunderstood: "rational love" is *not* this kind of love that comes from a true knowledge or good judgment; it is just the act by which the soul itself recognizes a certain object as worthy of love and experiences this quality in itself, *no matter whether its judgment is well grounded or not*.[10]

So, for Descartes, there are only accidental exceptions to the connection of the two kinds of love: we can feel a certain warmth in our heart without relating it to any determined object, or we can esteem an object to be most loveable while not having our body disposed "in the required manner" for the passion of love to excite us.

Nor does it seem to be the case that love could give rise to the sort of ambivalence in the soul that we can observe in the case of other passions: like the passion, for instance, that makes a certain sadness "in the outer parts of the soul" compatible with a certain joy in its "innermost depths"; or like a false joy that can leave a certain bitterness inside the soul (see e.g. Descartes' letter of October 6, 1645, to Princess Elisabeth: AT 4, 305f; CSMK, 268). In other words, it just does not seem to be the case that loving an object can be accompanied by hating or intellectually rejecting that very object, or inversely that an intellectual love is compatible with a passion of hate with respect to the same object. And this is probably because love (and hatred) cannot have a *merely occasional* or *apparent* object, unlike pleasure, pain, joy or sadness: not only do we experience intellectual love only towards things that *seem* agreeable to us, but moreover we feel the passion of love only for objects whose benefits and pleasantness can be experienced repeatedly. Thus, if there is an ambivalence, it will not make for competition between *a passion and an intellectual emotion*—nor, of course, between two intellectual emotions, once we consider them as they are and as rational affections—but only between *two differently founded passions*.

Now, on the Spinozan side, we can indeed speak of an absolute character of the affect, but the possibility still remains that two opposite affects be present in the soul concerning the same object; this is the case in what Spinoza has notoriously called *fluctuatio animi* (E3P17S).

(2) The second question, about love and joy, is a bit more complicated. In reducing love to a kind of joy, Spinoza obviously overthrows the classical priority of love with regard to all other passions. In the most classical view, which is partly resumed by Descartes, we feel joy when the object

of our love is present, and sadness when it is absent. (I say "partly", because joy is, for Descartes as well as for Spinoza, a basically self-centered affect). The meaning of this Spinozan subversion of the classical view is well known: there is no predetermination or preordination of human affectivity by, or to, a supreme object. As Alanen (2016, 87) correctly points out: "We have no special faculty of will or volition directed at the good. We are not moved by ends at all, but by [a] basic conatus force driving us".

What is exactly the case in Descartes? In the system of the six primitive passions, love and hatred actually take place before desire, joy, and sadness. Nevertheless, love is not really the first passion: the first of all passions is *wonder* ("l'admiration"), to which we are subject *before* recognizing whether its object may have a good or bad effect on us. The priority of love is therefore only relative, and has no empirical or phenomenological ground, nor any metaphysical meaning; it is just tied to the fact that, as Spinoza says (E1P1), "a substance is prior in nature to its affections": the object of love is always a substance or something substantialized, while desire, joy, or sadness relates to accidents or affections.

When Descartes points out that the object of love is subject to no condition of time, while the object of desire, joy, or sadness is by its essence set in, or aimed at, a certain temporal horizon, this is a way of expressing this unequality. But this categorical distinction between the objects of these passions does not at all mean that there cannot be any intrinsic relation between them, or any close connection between those passions themselves. In this respect, we can rather notice a special solidarity between love and joy.

About the first passions of our life, those passions that we have felt before our birth, Descartes writes in the letter on love to Chanut:

> I consider it probable that the soul felt joy at the first moment of its union with the body, and immediately after it felt love, then perhaps also hatred, and sadness [. . .]. I think that the soul's first passion was joy, because it is not credible that the soul was put into the body at a time when the body was not in a good condition and a good condition of the body naturally gives us joy. I say that love followed because the matter of our body is in a perpetual flux like the water in a stream, and there is always need for new matter to take its place, so that it is scarcely likely that the body would have been in a good condition unless there were nearby some matter suitable for food and [I say that] the soul, uniting itself by volition to that new matter, felt love for it, and later, if the food happened to be lacking, it felt sadness. And if its place was taken by some other matter unsuitable as food for the body, it felt hatred.
>
> (AT 4, 604f; CSMK, 307f)

This text deserves a long commentary. But what matters for our purposes here is that if joy is at first the feeling of a good state of the body, the preservation of this good state requires a constant nourishment (that of the heat of the heart, which is the principle of life). This joy thus cannot subsist without being related, even in a very confused way, to the effect of a certain food, which is the first object of love (but what needs feeding is not only the heart or the whole body: the soul also does, and the self or the composite with its representation of itself). And in *The Passions of the Soul*, joy will appear as the most current origin of love: "The natural use [of five of the 'simple and primitive passions': love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness]", Descartes says (art. 137), "is to incite the soul to consent and contribute to actions which serve to preserve the body or render it more perfect in some way"; and in this respect, "sadness and joy are the first two that are employed: the soul is immediately informed of things useful to the body by some sort of titillation, which exciting Joy in it, next arouses love of what one believes to be its cause, etc." (AT 11, 430; Voss, 92).

Nevertheless, from a Cartesian point of view, reducing love to a sort of joy will remain a mistake, given that (1) we can be at the same time in love (loving) and sad (when the object of our love is absent); and (2) each primitive passion being excited in the soul by a specific physiological process, the psycho-physiological essence of love cannot be the same as that of joy.

Let us go back to Spinoza. The first point to take into account is that he pays no attention at all to the physiological processes and differences which Descartes is so proud to have shed light on. These are probably, to his eyes, highly conjectural constructions, and the limits of our knowledge of the human body will probably make a true science of this matter impossible. But there is also room here for some additional observations.

First, about his own definition of love, Spinoza says: this definition "explains the essence of love clearly enough" (E3, Expl. of Def. 6 of the Affects; Curley, 533). Maybe we should understand him here as suggesting that this definition is sufficiently good, even if not perfect: it is the best definition one can provide, but it does not express or involve all the core aspects of the affect in question. In E2D2, we read:

> To the essence of anything belongs that which, being given, the thing is [also] necessarily posited, and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which that thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.
>
> (Curley, 447)

Accordingly, we can say: whenever joy is accompanied by the idea of an external cause (a connection which must be something more than a mere

coincidence, because we must have some reasons, even confused, to take a certain thing as the cause of our joy), there is love, and there is no love unless our joy be accompanied by such an idea. In other words, love is what is the case when this sort of connection takes place in the mind.

But this is not yet a description of our relation to the thing we love. In order to progress in this description, one should add:

(*a*) Everything (or every cause) is an object of our love, the idea or imagination of which is for us a cause or occasion of joy.
(*b*) Everything is an object of our love, which, as a thing, we strive to imagine and keep thus present to our mind.
(*c*) Everything is an object of love, the empirical presence or possession of which we try to preserve in the mode which seems to us appropriate.

We therefore find again this condition: love—as a passion—is an imaginative enjoyment or "complacency", a kind of imaginative union to an object, a union which tends as much as possible—but only as far as it seems to make sense—to a more empirical one. We are here again very close to the Cartesian account.

Second, in Spinoza's *Explanation of the Definition of Love*, we find a sign, maybe unclear, of the specificity of this affect, with the mention of the satisfaction, *acquiescentia*, that the lover feels on account of the presence of the thing loved.

This is in fact a very puzzling clause, because it is not clear whether Spinoza speaks of a physical presence or of a mere presence to the mind. In the first case, it is hard to see what role is devoted to the will, whatever the definition of this will might be. Secondly, there would be a kind of contradiction between this statement and the previous one (love can be conceived without the desire of continuing in the presence of the thing loved, and this desire is not what Spinoza understands here by will).

In any case, if this *acquiescentia* (we must include in this word both approval and rest or quietness of the mind) contributes to the lover's joy in strengthening or encouraging it, it cannot be quite the same affect as this joy itself.

By the way, we can find in Hobbes, to whom Spinoza' moral anthropology is obviously also greatly indebted, a similarly incomplete definition of love. In the *Elements of Law* (I, 7, 1), Hobbes begins with saying that a motion in the heart that helps the vital motion is called *delight*, *contentment*, and *pleasure*, and "the same delight, with reference to the object [the triggering object, the apparition or conception of which constitutes the first motion], is called *love*" (Hobbes 1840, 31). Spinoza's definition is therefore very similar to Hobbes's. But in the famous section I, 9, 21, where Hobbes compares human life with a race, we read: "to hold fast by another is to *love*" (*ibid*., 53)—and this seems to me another

sort of definition.[11] But if we are here very close to the Cartesian account, Spinoza does not want to acknowledge this closeness. On the contrary, he seems to try to make it undetectable.

Let us summarize the point: when Spinoza defines love as joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause, there is no evidence that he would claim that love be nothing more than a species or specification of joy.

The important thing is not that love would be a species of joy (all this concern with species and genre is, from Spinoza's point of view, still scholastic), but that it arises and is given from joy. The *Ethics* will *not* explain to you what it is like to be in love, or just to love a certain object; it will just explain the consequences, in the mind and in its relation to other minds, that is, the other affects generated on this ground.

By the way, the causes by which we are determined to love such and such objects rather than other ones are basically the same in Descartes and in Spinoza. But the heart of the problem is that for Spinoza, no love seems philosophically interesting except the love of God. No other love is worth analyzing; and that is certainly why what is for Descartes the core aspect of love, the imagination of the whole which the lover forms with the object, is finally not mentioned at all.

This Spinozan disinvestment of love of other objects is tied to a deep skepticism concerning the luck and destiny of loving anything except God. Insofar as the object of love is contingent and perishable, love itself cannot subsist: this is the lesson of the *Short Treatise* (II, V, 6) and also of the *Treatise on the Reform of the Intellect* (§ 9–10). The only solid love is devoted to an object that is necessary and therefore universal, an object that the mind cannot miss, and that in a certain sense belongs already to us: this object is God and nothing else; and of course, through God, the whole nature. This also means that with regard to the finite and perishable things, if we make an exception for the civil or political form of union, the union by volition means probably nothing. But if the love of God is an exception to the common form of love, this exception could not take place in the third part of the *Ethics*, not only because it is an active affect and not a passion, but because this love has to be discovered by those minds that are able to do so.

Notes

1 I quote the *Ethics*, in Edwin Curley's translation; see Curley 1985. For the Latin text see Spinoza 1925/1972.

2 On this question, see for instance Frigo 2016. In a highly valuable study, Frigo writes that "The object of Spinoza's criticism here is quite explicitly articles 79–83 of *The Passions of the Soul*" (Frigo 2016, 1098). See also Macherey 1995, 149n1. According to Curley (1985, 533n41), "Spinoza may have in mind Descartes PA 79 [*The Passions of the Soul*, art. 79]", but "he need not have only one opponent in mind", and "earlier, however, in [art. 56], Descartes has given an account of love closer to Spinoza's".

3 Voss 1989, 62 (slightly modified); cf. AT 11, 387. Throughout the chapter I quote *The Passions of the Soul* in Stephen Voss' translation (referred to as

"Voss", followed by page number). The French text reads: "L'amour est une émotion de l'âme, causée par les esprits (animaux), qui l'incite à se joindre de volonté aux objets qui paraissent lui être convenables", and in its Latin translation (1650): *Amor est commotio animae, producta motu spirituum, qui eam incitat ad se voluntate jungendum objectis quae ipsi convenientia videntur*. For the French text see Descartes 2010.

4 Curley omits *voluntate*, "in volition".

5 "As soon as we have joined ourselves in volition to some object, whatever its nature may be, we have benevolence for it [. . .]. And if we judge it to be associated with it in some other manner than in volition, we desire it" (Voss, 62–63).

6 Voss' translation, slightly modified. The French text reads: "La haine est une émotion [. . .] qui incite l'âme à vouloir être séparée des objets qui se présentent à elle comme nuisibles"; and the Latin: *Odium est commotio* [. . .] *quae animam ad id incitat ut velit separari ab objectis quae illi offeruntur ut noxia*.

7 On Leo Hebrew and Spinoza, see among the more recent studies (after Solmi 1903; Gentile 1923; Wolfson 1934 II, 277–79) Ansaldi 2005, 23–40; Jaquet 2005, 163–78.

8 See Kambouchner 2006, 88–89, 2013, 93.

9 "Par le mot de volonté, [j'entends parler seulement] du consentement par lequel *on se considère dès à présent* comme joint avec ce qu'on aime. . . ".

10 See Kambouchner 1995 I, 345–67, 2006, 84–85.

11 We find the same kind of tension in *Leviathan*, VI: "Desire and Love are the same thing; save that by desire, we always signify the absence of the object; by love, most commonly the presence of the same" (Hobbes 2012, 80); but also: "Love of one singularly, with desire to be singularly beloved, [is] the passion of love" (*ibid*., 86).

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15 Self and Will in Descartes's Account of Love

Lilli Alanen

This chapter takes a close look at Descartes's definition of love and examines the distinction he makes between intellectual love and love as a passion developed in correspondence to answer a question about the nature and possibility of love of God. Intellectual emotions come up also in *The Passions of the Soul*, where Descartes introduces what he calls "interior emotions" as a general remedy to the passions that will not be discussed here. The definition Descartes gives of love, as well as his distinction between two species of love, are echoed in the distinction Spinoza makes between active and passive affects, and also in Spinoza's notion of intellectual love of God, that I discuss in another context.[1] My aim here is first to shed some light on the role Descartes gives to the will in his account of love and of the passions more generally, and second to analyze the interdependence of the intellectual and the bodily elements in his theory that illustrates the strong unity of the Cartesian mind-body composite, and raises questions about the autonomy of the will and the self in the strict sense of a rational mind.

1. The Essence of Love

I will start by looking at Descartes's account of love in his letter to Chanut of 1 February 1647 and in *The Passions of the Soul* that he worked on roughly around the same time. Pierre Chanut, French ambassador in Stockholm, and one of his closest friends, asked the philosopher to explain what love is and more particularly how it is possible to love God using natural reason alone without the aid of religion and divine grace. How can an object that is infinite in every sense inspire anything else than "astonishment (*étonnement*, here: wonder or amazement) and a very respectful confusion" (AT 10, 611)?[2] The question is of great importance for early modern philosophy, and the way Chanut formulates it is interesting. It can be addressed to Descartes as much as to Spinoza, even when their respective views of God are very different. Descartes devotes the Third Meditation to the idea of God and to demonstrating his existence

and ends with a glowing description of the contemplation of God as the source of the highest joy in this life.[3]

Descartes answers by distinguishing between two species of love, clear and distinct love "which is purely rational (*raisonnable*)", and love that is a confused thought or "a passion (*une passion*)" properly (to Chanut, February 1 1647, AT 4, 601; CSMK, 306). The first is described in terms of joining oneself in will to an object considered good:

> The first in my view consists simply in that when our soul notices (*s'apercoit de*) some good, present or absent, which it judges to be fitting for itself, it joins itself willingly (*de volonté*) to it, that is to say, it considers itself and the good in question as a whole of which it is one part and the good another.
>
> (AT 4, 601; CSMK, 306)

Rational love as here defined is purely intellectual, and is based on (1) a prior perception of a good that is judged to be fitting for oneself. A wholly cognitive affair, it would seem, were it not for the fact that the cognitive act here includes (2) the will uniting the soul with the good so perceived. Through the action of its will the soul comes, as Descartes puts it, to 'considers' itself as forming a whole with the good perceived. This characterization of love is remotely reminiscent of Aristophanes' tale in Plato's *Symposium*, to which Descartes as will be seen refers though only in the context of explaining sensual love in the *Passions*.

The second species of love, i.e., love as a passion, is defined by Descartes together with hate in article 79 of *The Passions of the Soul* [4] using similar terms:

> Love is an emotion of the soul caused by the movement of the spirits, which incites it to join itself by will (*de volonté*) to objects that appear suitable to it. And hate is an emotion, caused by the spirits, which incites the soul to will (*qui incite l'âme à vouloir*) to be separated from objects that present themselves as harmful.
>
> (AT 11, 387, CSM 1, 356)[5]

It is worth noting the passivity of the cognitive perceptions here: the objects "appear" to the soul or "present themselves" to it as good or bad. The way they appear or present themselves to the soul depends on the fact that they are caused by the movements of animal spirits in the brain, which are themselves triggered by the action of external objects on the bodily organs. He continues:

> I say these two emotions are caused by the spirits, in order to distinguish love and hate which are passions and depend on the body both from the judgments which also incline the soul to join itself by will

> with the things she deems good and to separate itself from those she deems bad, and from the emotions that these mere judgments cause in the soul.
>
> (Art. 79 AT 11, 387, A 1012–13, CSM 1, 356)

Their cause—the movements of the animal spirits—is important here because it distinguishes them as passions of love and hate from the corresponding intellectual emotions of love and hate that are caused by the soul itself—by its distinct perceptions. I will get back to this difference soon. As to the act of will or volition whereby one joins oneself to the object loved that seems common to both species of love, it is not, as Descartes explains, the same as desire, which for Descartes is a passion relating to the future. The act or emotion of will that is essential to love is instead an immediate acceptance or

> consent (*consentement*) whereby one considers oneself from this very moment as if joined with what one loves: in such a way that one imagines a whole, thinking of oneself merely as a part of it, and the thing loved another.
>
> (Art. 80: AT 11, 387; CSM 1, 356)[6]

Before discussing the definition given in Article 79 and the gloss on it in article 80 I want to recall that judgment, as Descartes explains it in Meditation Four and in the *Principles*, involves the exercise of two separate but concurrent powers or abilities, the intellect, that perceives something as good, and the will that assents to this perception. (AT 7, 56; CSM 2, 39)[7] The former—the perceptions of the good—belong to what Descartes says can be called passions in a general sense of the word because they "are received from the things represented by them". The latter again is active: "those I call its actions are all our volitions (*volontés*) because we experience that they come directly from our soul, and seem to depend on it alone" (AT 11, 342; CSM 1, 335). Descartes takes it here and elsewhere for granted that we have a clear experience of our will as depending on the soul alone—an assumption that Spinoza ridicules: that we take our volitions to be free shows nothing but our ignorance of their causes. Spinoza, who well knew Descartes's treatise and its mechanistic account of human passions in the stricter sense of emotions or affects, had many reasons to question Descartes's distinction between the actions and passions of the soul on the basis of mere inner experience.[8] Descartes's own account of the passions in the strict sense, as the reading here defended suggests, seems to undermine this distinction on several points. It gives us, as will be seen, material to wonder about how exactly to separate the passions of the soul from its actions, or, more generally, its perceptions from its volitions.

Love, as defined above, is more like judgment or belief, and the joining of oneself to the object loved is a joining in thought, for the object, as we saw, could be present or absent. Yet joining oneself *de volonté* must also be something over and above the assent whereby the judgment is formed—it is more than a mere belief. Assent here—an act of the will—is given to the perception or idea of the thing as good, so is part of the cognitive act of judging a thing to be good. [9] If this evaluative judgment is a cognitive act, it has an immediate effect on the will, disposing it to will the union, so is also a conative act moving the soul to join itself to the object.

It is not quite clear how, exactly, one should understand joining oneself *de volonté*. To unite oneself to another by volition is not the same as pursuing in the sense of desiring the union with the other (even though this is how Descartes is often understood, not least in Spinoza's paraphrase of what seems to be the Cartesian definition).[10] Pursuing something or desiring it, as will be seen, are among the effects of love, but not part of its essence—on this point Descartes and Spinoza seem to be in agreement. So there are two problems to reflect on here: how should we understand what Descartes calls judgment in this context, and what is the role given to the will in the phrase uniting oneself by *volonté*?[11] Let us see if we get any help from the account of love given in the *Passions*.

If Descartes in his letter to Chanut starts by defining the intellectual emotion of love before defining the corresponding passion, the order of proceeding in the *Passions* is different. Here the latter is defined first[12]—in fact, no separate definition is given here of intellectual emotions which are alluded to only indirectly in art. 79 cited above. Yet remarkably this definition of the passion of love that depends on the body picks out the intellectual element as an essential component together with its causes. Descartes also uses (though this may not be of any consequence), the term emotion instead of passion in the definition, in writing that "Love is an emotion of the soul caused by movements of the spirits, which incite it (*l'incite*) to join itself by will to objects that appear suitable to it" (Art. 79: AT 11, 387; CSM 1, 356).

There are several things to note here. The first is that the cognitive act is said to be a matter of what seems or appears suitable, implying that it may not actually be good. Being caused in the last instance by animal spirits, the movements of which may have all sorts of internal or external bodily causes, the value of their first cause or object has not been subjected to critical assessment or appraisal (true judgment). As we saw, what distinguishes the emotion (the joining oneself by will) in the passion from its intellectual counterpart, as well as from the judgment prompting the latter, is the way this emotion is caused, namely by the spirits, not by rational judgment or appraisal. As to "the emotions that these [latter] mere judgments excite in the soul" mentioned at the end of Article. 80, they are what in the letter to Chanut are called "intellectual emotions". This confirms that there is more to the intellectual emotion than the mere

judgment (which already involves an act of assent by the will), namely the actual willing to be joined to the object in the way described—forming a whole with it—which is a common element in both species of love. As noted before this is not a desire or wish to pursue or to remain joined with the object loved—it is not directed at the future. It is rather an attitude of consent to the idea of forming from this moment on a union, "to imagining a whole of which one is only a part, the thing loved being another" (art. 80 AT 11, 387; CSM 1, 356).

Descartes contrasts the passion of love so defined to what is usually called by the name 'love'—the subject of novelists and poets—that he calls "desire arising from beauty (*agrément*)" and which is a passion "specially ordained by nature to represent the enjoyment of that which attracts us as the greatest of all the goods belonging to mankind". Its most powerful form is sexual desire, that he now describes in terms borrowed from Aristophanes' famous myth (in Plato's *Symposium*, 189d–193d). We read:

> [T]he principal attractions come from the perfections we imagine in a person who we think capable of becoming a second self. For nature has established a difference of sex in human beings, as in animals lacking reason, and . . . certain impressions in the brain which bring it about that at a certain age we regard ourselves as deficient—as forming only one half of a whole, whose other half must be a person of the opposite sex.
>
> (AT 11, 395; CSM 1, 360)

Here the object of desire is seen or represented as good not by the intellect but by the senses and the impressions in the brain, as is the subject now imagining itself as deficient and in need of this other person to complement and perfect herself. Such evaluative representations caused by particular movements of the spirits in the body belong to what Descartes calls obscure and confused perceptions.[13]

The third thing to note is that whether the emotion in love is caused by a judgment of reason (so by the soul or will itself) or by external causes like movements of the bodily spirits with associated ideas and bodily motions, it has the same effect: prompting the soul to join itself, i.e., to consider itself (or form a belief of itself) as part of a whole of which the thing loved is another part. So, it seems that the emotion of love, i.e., the voluntary union with the object loved can come about in two ways, on the one hand through a sensuous passion which is a confused thought, and on the other hand through a judgment of the intellect which, ideally, is a rationally grounded, clear and distinct thought representing the object according to its true value.[14]

Descartes is careful to distinguish love from what he sees as effects of love from its properties. Thus what by the Scholastics was called love

as benevolence and love as concupiscence (and with the latter the desire to possess the object loved) are effects of love but not part of its essence (*Passions*, art. 81: AT 11, 388). Considering oneself as united, *de volonté*, with the object loved is therefore neither to possess nor to desire to possess it. It is rather like taking on a (voluntary) commitment to treat the object as part of a larger self, and once this emotion or willed disposition to love is in place, benevolence, and perhaps desire too, follows.[15]

If Descartes is not the first to talk of intellectual emotions or intellectual love, his definition of it seems original. He also contends, both in the letter to Chanut and in the *Passions*, that our nature is set up in such a way that intellectual emotions are always accompanied by corresponding passions, and moreover that there is always this intellectual element even in the obscurest passion. How then, exactly, do they differ, other than by their causes?

The following picture emerges: What Descartes calls intellectual emotions have intellectual objects—objects of understanding, not of the senses. The soul is essentially an understander, a truth-seeker or a cognitive agent as John Carriero has called it, one differing from cognitive agents as traditionally understood in that it has these two essential functions or operations, intellect and will, the latter being naturally disposed to follow the former but still working somehow independently of it. The soul, we may say, is inclined by nature to pursue the true and the good that its intellect perceives (Carriero 2009, 250–51). Consider the example Descartes uses to illustrate the derivation of the other intellectual emotions from that of love in his letter to Chanut:

> [I]f the soul perceived that there are many fine things to be known about nature, its will would infallibly bring itself (*sa volonté se porterait infailliblement*) to love the knowledge of those things, that is to consider it as belonging to itself. And if it was aware of not having that knowledge, it would have sadness, and if it thought it would be a good thing to acquire it, it would have desire. There is nothing in all these movements of its will which would be obscure to it, or anything of which it could fail to know perfectly (*dont elle n'eut une très parfaite connaissance)*, provided it reflected on its own thoughts. (AT 4, 602; CSMK, 306)

The soul naturally takes joy in having knowledge, and is sad when lacking it, when not understanding things. The intellectual emotions are transparent—there is nothing in them, qua rational thoughts that we could not, upon reflection, understand or that we in understanding would not take pleasure in or rejoice about. The soul here follows its natural disposition, the natural tendency of its will.

With the body-dependent passions things get complex and muddier. If the will is endowed with a natural inclination to seek and assent to the

true and to pursue the good, there are all these other impulses and incitements depending on its nature as embodied. While the natural function of the passions is to incline the soul to what serves the wellbeing of the mind-body union, such inclinations or impulses are by nature confused and can also be violent. The passions work on the will through the body: they cause various changes and dispositions in the body and its limbs, thereby inciting the will to consent to reactive behavior or actions to which they jointly prepare the body.[16] Thus the trembling of one's limbs in fear disposes the will to flee, while a sufficient amount of adrenaline incites courage—the will to fight back—and these effects on the soul are psychological counterparts or reflections of corresponding physiological changes in the body, preparing its members to perform the very actions they bring the soul to contemplate (conquering in sensual love, seeking protection in fear, or defending itself in courage). The passions can bring a soul to will and consent to all sorts of actions it may later regret, but they can never compel it. Inclining, disposing or inciting the soul is not the same as determining it. Here Descartes famously appeals to a free power of decision of the will, assuming that it comes with a power of opposites, i.e., to assent or not assent to any perceptions of the good, as well as to consent to or resist whatever it is prompted to pursue or avoid by its passions.[17] I will get back to Descartes's account of the passions and the will but now turn briefly to his distinction between different objects of love and its moral implications.

2. Love, Self-Love, and Morality

Descartes derives important consequences from his definition of love for ethics—for the "morale" developed in his correspondence (with Elisabeth, Chanut, Queen Christina) and in the *Passions*. To Elisabeth he wrote, before having developed his own definition of love, that one should always put the interest of the whole of which one is part before one's own particular interests, whether the good one is thus joined to is another person, one's family, society, king or nation (September 15 1645, AT 4, 293; CSMK, 266).[18] And to Chanut he writes:

> It is the nature of love to make one consider oneself together with the object loved as a whole of which one is but a part, and to transfer the care one usually has for oneself to the preservation of this whole in such a way as to keep for oneself in particular only a part of it [of the care], which is as great or little as one deems one's own part of the whole to which one has given one's affection.
>
> (AT 4, 611–12; CSMK, 311)

Although Descartes does not (as Spinoza does in *Ethics*, Part Four) dwell on this point, self-love is here the starting point, so the care one

has for oneself is simply transferred to the whole one has thus formed through one's will and of which one henceforth considers oneself as part. The whole so formed constitutes, as it were, a larger self. Depending on how you evaluate the object as compared to yourself—the part that it constitutes of the whole you now identify with, your love and care for it will be greater or lesser than the one you have for yourself, and the greater it is, the less you will hesitate to sacrifice yourself for it.[19]

Descartes here reworks the traditional Augustinian ordering of objects of love (*ordo caritatis*) into his definition of love itself and the distinction of three sorts of love (simple affection, friendship, and devotion in art. 83), based on how one estimates one's self as compared to the value attributed to the object loved. Thus, when one esteems the object loved less than oneself—say a plant, an animal, or an artefact—one has a simple affection for it, whereas if one esteems it as equal to oneself, one has friendship, and when one esteems it as greater than oneself, one's passion can be called devotion. The most proper and principal object of devotion is divinity, but one can have it also for one's prince (president!), city, country, and even for some particular person one holds in the highest regard (art. 83: AT 11, 390, A 1016–17) No one of sound mind would sacrifice her self-interest or life for an object of mere affection, but in friendship or devotion one is ready to give one's life to save the other part of the union one has formed with the object loved.[20]

None of this is a matter of calculation but of virtue or habit—thus those who are generous are naturally disposed to do good or, if they have the means, and they deem nothing greater than doing good for other persons neglecting their own interest which they do not value as much (see art. 156: AT 11, 448). Altruism and benevolence comes naturally with love that is not mixed up with bad passions, and the purest love of all, according to Descartes, is the disinterested love of a parent for her children. A parent can put their interest first and does not hesitate to sacrifice her life to save her children (see art. 82: AT 11, 389).

There is room of course to debate about the purity of this love, i.e., of whether general altruism can grow out of self-interest or not. Harry Frankfurt, in his "The Dear Self" (2001), asks why self-love could not be pure—perhaps even the purest of all kinds of love? Self-love, at least, need not be intrinsically bad—whether it is, would depend in Descartes's account on the kind of objects it would consider worth uniting itself to, so also on the kind of self it is and strives to be. What matters here, I argue, is whether the good that the self joins itself to willingly is intrinsically good or not.[21] The nature of the self one seeks to be, and the means one has to perfect it accordingly are crucial here. The greatest and most perfect of all loves, the love of God,[22] as Descartes defines it, is a form of Self-love too, but loving God as will be seen is not merely a matter of judgment with the accompanying intellectual emotion, but requires support from a corresponding bodily passion and also that the passions

in general are somehow in control. Let us therefore turn again to Descartes's account of the latter.

3. The Genesis of Passions and the Interdependence of Passions and Intellectual Emotions

Love that depends on the body (the animal spirits and the senses) is said to accompany the rational love described above. While rational love is a "clear and distinct" thought, love of the former, sensuous kind, "is nothing but a confused thought, aroused in the soul by some motion of the nerves". Like in any other passion, these motions and the "confused thoughts" caused by it also affect the soul, more precisely, its will, making "it disposed to have the other, clearer, thought which constitutes rational love" (AT 4, 602–03; CSMK, 306).

How, then, can a confused thought dispose the soul to a clearer thought—how can a passion dispose to an emotion of the intellectual kind? As we have seen, the passion of love inclines our soul, i.e., the will (the motive power of mind or soul) to judge that the object (represented as) causing it *is* good.[23] This need not be a matter of explicit judgment, but can be a hastily formed uncritical opinion expressed in one's behavior, in the fact that the soul through its will, incited by the passion, comes to "to consent and contribute (*consentir et contribuer*) to actions which may serve to preserve the body or render it in some way more perfect" (art. 137: AT 11, 430; CSM 1, 376). While intellectual love is preceded by and prompted by a judgment that an object is good so love worthy, the passion of love that depends on the state of the body and its motions is always caused by a prior stimulation of its sensory organs by some object or other, which through the ensuing mechanism of association of brain motions and ideas inclines the will to consent to the belief that it is good and worth pursuing.

As we have seen these two kinds of love, the rational love depending on clear and distinct perceptions and the passion, which depends on the organs and affections of the body with associated confused thoughts (beliefs), commonly occur together in this present life. It is not just that the bodily movements cause a confused thought which is a sensation, say of heat around the heart, but moreover, the latter affects the will *disposing it* to consider itself (the soul) as united to whatever good presents itself to it, or is associated in thought to this sensation. Passions, in Descartes's theory, are complex psycho-physical phenomena: there is, on the one hand, always a thought or an intellectual element even in the obscurest passion caused through the body, and, on the other hand, rational love never occurs without some accompanying passion or bodily affection.[24] So were it not for the special disposition of the heart, that is, the feeling of warmth, an object of the intellect may have little effect on one's will and fail to produce any disposition to unite oneself to it. A union formed

on the basis of rational considerations alone may thus remain ineffective and could not be upheld without being supported by some corresponding passion.

In his letter to Chanut Descartes illustrates the connection or "association between each of its thoughts and certain motions or conditions of this body" set up by nature (AT 4, 604; CSMK, 307) with detailed speculations about the first emotions of love and joy that the soul experienced when joined to the fetus in the womb of the mother, and receiving suitable nourishment. Once it is united to the body, the soul loves, i.e. joins itself by will to the body and to whatever nourishes it.[25] Whatever new matter its body takes in that serves its wellbeing and growth will, as Descartes explains, necessarily make it feel love and joy, and what hurts it, for instance, the lack of nourishment, makes it feel sadness (and perhaps anger). Descartes then derives from this first sentiment of love the five basic passions, which are on his list of what the treatise of *Passions* calls primitive passions (including love, hatred, joy, sadness, and desire), and from whose various combinations all other passions are formed. They were all first "only sensations or very confused thoughts", because "the soul was so attached to matter that it could not yet do anything else except receive various impressions from it" (AT 4, 605; CSMK, 308).

The derivation parallels that of the rational emotions from the movement of will in intellectual love given at the beginning of the same letter. Thus, once the soul, prompted by the course of the animal spirits, deems an object worth loving, and this object is present, that is, when the soul is joined to it not only by will (in thought that is) but also in fact or actually, then the movement of the will caused by the knowledge of being united to the good constitutes its joy. On the contrary, when the good is absent, the movement of the will, which follows from knowing that it does not possess it, is its sadness (AT 4, 601; CSMK, 306). Finally "the movement [of the will] which accompanies the knowledge that it would be a good thing to acquire it is desire" (AT 4, 601–02; CSMK, 306).[26] While all these emotions, love, joy, sadness, and desire, qua rational thoughts, are mere movements of the will—the will that for Descartes is part of intellect or reason—the corresponding passions with which we are now concerned are confused thoughts caused and accompanied by movements in the body.[27]

I will hereafter speak of these movements of will as 'intellectual emotions', by contrast to the confused affections or 'passions', which are caused by movements in the body and are psycho-physical states. The former all depend on the soul so are active or express its activity—they "could exist in our soul even if it has no body"—whereas the latter depend on the body and are 'passions' in Descartes's strict sense of the word, requiring external, bodily causes. Yet as we have seen, no matter how confused, passions too include a judgment or belief, i.e., an intellectual-cum-volitional element which as such is independent of the bodily

movements triggering, accompanying and as the case often is supporting or strengthening them. Although Descartes makes a point of distinguishing between the two, and this distinction is crucial for his ethics, the "intellectual" or "pure" emotions and the bodily passions occur together because of the way thoughts and bodily motions have become associated in the embodied mind. The intellectual element in the passion may be difficult to recognize, because of "the other bodily conditions which at the beginning of our life occurred with" our first four passion and that continue to accompany them throughout our life. Descartes admits "that it is because of these confused sensations of our childhood, which remain joined with the rational thoughts by which we love what we judge worthy of love, that the nature of love is difficult to understand". Add to this moreover that the other passions, "joy, sadness, desire, fear and hope, etc., mingle in various ways with love and thus prevent us from discovering exactly what constitutes it" (AT 4, 607; CSMK, 308; cf. art. 107: AT 11, 407; CSM 1, 365–66). Yet getting clear about this is a crucial condition for the mastery of passions, because it is at this point, in forming its judgment or opinion about the value of the object of a passion that the soul has power to intervene in the process through its will, and assert its free power of assent. According to Descartes's theory it can assent or not to the evaluative perception of the object presented to it, and if it withholds assent, reflect on its true value, even when, as is typically the case in strong passions, it fails to make use of this power.

4. Action, Passion, and the Mind-Body Union

Descartes famously declares in the Sixth Meditation that the soul is quasi intermingled with the body forming a unit with it. This intermixing of soul and body, as we have seen, is nowhere more apparent than in the passions, and foremost in love that is their uniting force.[28] In distinguishing three primitive notions in a letter to Elisabeth (21 May 1643), Descartes attributes "the perceptions of the intellect and the inclinations of will to the soul alone", while the power of the soul "to move the body" in voluntary action, and the body's power "to act on the soul causing its sensory perceptions (sentiments) and passions" are attributed to what he here calls the third primitive notion, that of the mind-body union.[29] The mind-body union, whatever it is, to quote Deborah Brown and Calvin Normore, "is something irreducible to the sum of it essential parts because it is the subject of unique sensory predicates" (Brown and Normore Forthcoming)[30] But it is also more than this because it is importantly the agent cause of effects that cannot be attributed to its constituent parts. The union is the locus of moral—practical and social agency—that neither of its component parts could cause or perform on their own.

In the first article of *The Passions of the Soul* we learn of an important aspect of the union: that what is an action in the body is a passion in the

mind, and that although the agent and patient are different, the action and passion are said to be always one and the same thing (*une meme chose*)—called by different names depending on the subject to which they can be attributed (see art. 1: AT 11, 320; CSM 1, 328, and art. 47: AT 11, 364; CSM 1, 346). If affectivity and voluntary agency are what constitutes the union, what is an action with regard to one of its component cannot be defined without what is a passion with regard to the other. Because of the "institution of nature", i. e., the nature as established by its creator, once a thought (i.e., the joy of the yet unborn infant in being properly fed and loving its food- uniting by will with the fresh blood from the mother) becomes associated to certain bodily actions, the latter will always accompany any later thoughts of love and joy, no matter what their object, causing that same sensation of heat around the heart and other organs (*Passions* art. 107: AT 11, 407–08; CSM 1, 365–366). They are indeed interdependent, for the various physiological and neural processes accompanying the passions are instituted to support and strengthen the first impressions of the object causing them and the ensuing movements of the will (art. 102: AT 11, 403–04; CSM 1, 364, and art. 106: AT 11, 406–07; CSM 1, 365), inciting "the soul to consent and contribute to actions which may serve to the preserve the body, or render it in some manner more perfect" (art. 137: AT 11, 430).[31] In serving the wellbeing of the body they contribute to preserving the soul's union with the body and its own wellbeing too.

Many of the passions moreover contribute to the perfection of the soul itself, as in strengthening its own intellectual emotions, e.g., its love of God, when later in life we discover that God is the highest good and therefore the most perfect object of our love, yet need the bodily passions to uphold our devotion. This is made very clear in Descartes's answer to Chanut's question about the love of God, where in spite of the exalted description Descartes gives of the delights of loving God based only on natural reason and the considerations he invokes, he also expresses misgivings about our human ability to naturally love God. These are rooted in his view of the intermixture of the two kinds of love, rational love and love as a passion, the latter causing all sorts of distractions that may conflict with or hinder the former. Not only is it hard for the soul to detach itself entirely from the senses in order to represent the truths arousing this perfect intellectual love, it is moreover not possible to communicate it to the imagination "so as to make it a passion" merely by willing it. Imagination needs aid from the senses and its images of corporeal things to work, and the passions need the work of imagination to be sustained. Indeed, towards the end of his letter to Chanut, Descartes confesses that though he does not think such metaphysical thoughts "hold any difficulty for your [Chanut's] mind", his own mind tires easily by them, "and the presence of sensible objects does not allow me to dwell on such things for too long" (AT 4, 613; CSMK, 331). Before making this blunt admission,

he gave Chanut this glowing account of how the proper passion could nevertheless be aroused:

> For although we cannot imagine anything in God, who is the object of our love, we can imagine our love itself, which consists in our wanting to unite ourselves to some object. That is, we can consider ourselves in relation to God as a minute part of all the immensity of the created universe . . . *and the idea of such a union by itself is sufficient to produce heat around the heart and cause a violent passion.*
> (AT 4, 610; CSMK, 310; emphasis added.)

The passion, *nota bene*, depends on the consideration of our self as a minute part of the infinite universe! From the point of view of orthodoxy, this pronouncement would be problematic for more reasons than one. Just before, as we saw, Descartes had committed to the infinity of the created universe-a heresy in itself. And now we are talking of uniting ourselves not to God but to his creation, almost as if like for Spinoza, they were one and the same thing (Descartes will have a lot of explaining to do both to Chanut, to Christina and to other Christian philosophers who would take him to task about the infinity of the created universe . . .). Note also the intense affect or passion that such thoughts are supposed to produce: thinking of being part of the immense extended universe created by God by itself causes the movements in the brain and heart of the passion of love.[32]

5. Activity and Passivity Reconsidered

Love as an intellectual emotion and love as a passion share the same essence: the emotion/will uniting one to the object loved. But they have different causes—the first depends entirely on the soul and its active judgments, the second depends also on the body. The definition we looked at is, I take it, a real definition supposed to capture the phenomenon of love, this thing, itself. How do we who experience them know, or distinguish, their causes?

The soul of the unborn fetus is totally immersed in its body and its sensations, and experiences its first obscure feelings of pleasure of joy when receiving suitable nourishment. Descartes locates the origin of love and other passions to this prenatal experiences of pleasure and pain causing the soul to unite the self to what its sensations present as good for the body.[33] Its first experience of pleasure is the archaic joy of the foetus—the urjoy of which all joys experienced in later in life will retain some element. It is a bodily passion experienced by the soul which at this point is so immersed in its confused sensations that it does not separate its own good from that of the body. The self that unites with what serves the body is here its true self- mind and body are one forming a true unity.

Growing up as a person is growing up to recognize other goods and a hierarchy of value for ordering, in the ways we have seen, one's objects of

love. It comes with discovering the soul or mind as one's better part and directing one's will thereafter, working on perfecting oneself by choosing the objects to unite with according to their true value. Ideally we should grow up to understand that God and the knowledge or contemplation of God and his works is our highest good, and so be joined *de volonté* to God, forming a larger unity with God, and extending our love also to all of his creation, including the very passions we are inflicted with—something that is supposed to come with the highest contentment.

Things are not quite as easy though. As we saw, love as an affective phenomenon, has an intellectual element as its essence—the consent or commitment to unite oneself to the object appearing or deemed as good, which since it is an act of the will, and the will is a self-mover, should be essentially an action and depend on the soul itself. The passion of love as an externally caused emotion or inclination in the will is purely passive, yet whether one goes along with it depends in the last instance on an act of consenting by one's will to be united to whatever object one finds oneself inclined to form a union with. How often though are we on the top of things, fully aware of the mechanisms moving us and of our power to intervene?

As we have seen, self-caused intellectual emotions that are essentially active, are normally—by institution of nature—accompanied by some supporting passion. But as noted Descartes also claims that what is an action in the soul is a passion in the body and vice versa, so that passion and action are in some sense one and the same thing. Action and passion are, as Descartes following the tradition uses these terms (see *Passions* art. 1–2: AT 11, 328; CSM 1, 328), complementary relative notions that are also applied in his analysis of so called pure acts of the will: The soul in willing does not merely will, but perceives itself as willing. Perception is passivity, willing is activity- and again passion and action are one and the same thing. The soul in itself is thus at once active and passive depending on the point of view taken in considering it. Descartes, remarkably, deals with this by declaring that because activity is nobler than passivity, it stands above the latter in the hierarchy of perfections, and is therefore called by its nobler name (art. 19: AT 11, 343; CSM 1, 335–36).

If this does not help to remove the ambiguity it can serve to explain how it comes about that passions, as we experience them, may be taken as volitions, i.e., as expressions of our own (free) will, which they really cannot be, given that they depend on the body. I find support for my claim that our passions according to Descartes may be taken to be volitions in the fact that he describes them as being referred by us to "the soul alone", because one feels ("*on sent*") their effects, "as in the soul itself" ("*comme en l'âme même*") without knowing their proximate cause (art. 25: AT 11, 347; CSM 1, 337).[34] These effects that are felt as in the soul, on my reading, are the various motions of the will incited by the common causes of the passions, i.e., the action of external things on our nerves and brain

that we are not directly aware of. Ignorant as we are of their actual causal genesis we take them to be our own volitions or evaluative beliefs and so to depend on our soul.[35] I give in to my passion for Gauloise cigarettes because I like them and want to smoke: this is my will and I smoke out of free decision no matter what the consequences, but you who know better may see me as another victim of bad habits and nicotine addiction. Or consider this example in line with Descartes's about the cross-eyed girl. You may pretend you have plenty of reasons to like that person you are suddenly infatuated with but that others—your true friends—find insufferable: in referring your love for her to your soul you see it as your own willed commitment caused and justified by what you take to be the use of your own judgment. Once you sober up and see her for what she is you come to realize, perhaps, that she merely reminded you of someone else—a truly good person—that was very dear to you, and that sadly she had none of the good qualities that your love bestowed on her. Our passions, on the reading here suggested, are experienced as our own volitions, at least initially, till we are brought to see our mistake, and come to realize that we (Descartes claims) had the power to will otherwise. Spinoza thinks that there is nothing we could ever have done otherwise, and that believing in a free will or power of decision is like dreaming with open eyes. He also famously argues that we regard something as good and worth pursuing only because we desire it, not the other way around. He formulates this thesis in opposition to and with the terms of Descartes's theory: we "neither strive for, will, . . . nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge it to be good because we strive for it, will it, have an appetite for it, and desire it" (*Ethics*, 3p9).

Descartes, as scholars have pointed out, may seem torn between these two opposite views—on the one hand a traditional rationalist or intellectualist position defended by Aquinas and his followers, according to which the will is aligned to the intellect and its clear and distinct perceptions of the good, and on the other hand, a voluntarist position giving priority to the will over the intellect, where value is not discovered or appraised by the intellect but bestowed on things by our will.[36]

I have to leave the discussion of the difficult question how to tell one's actions from one's passions in Descartes's theory and what power one has over the latter to another context. To answer it more needs to be said not only about the notion of passions as passive perceptions referred to the soul, but also about what Descartes in *The Passions of the Soul* calls interior emotions, and holds to be crucial for the mastery of passions. They are not all the same as the intellectual emotions discussed in the letter to Chanut, since some of them are secondary emotions presupposing the bodily passions and our awareness of being affected by them, yet like the intellectual emotions they should produce an inner joy or contentment, one depending on our own reflections, that protects the soul from being subdued by its passions.[37]

Notes

1 See my 2016 and Denis Kambouchner's chapter in the present volume for a subtle and insightful discussion of their respective accounts of love. I examine what I take to be Spinoza's two notions of love of God in my "The Mind's Power over the Affects and Intellectual Love of God" (in progress).
2 Letter of 1 December 1646 from Pierre Chanut to Descartes.
3 "I should like to pause here and spend some time in the contemplation of God: to reflect on his attributes, and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it. For just as we believe through faith that the supreme happiness of next life consists solely in the contemplation of the divine majesty, *so experience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life*" (AT 7, 52; CSM 2, 36; emphasis added). John Carriero draws attention to the fact that we according to Descartes can get a taste—already in this life—of the joy of contemplating God (*visio dei*), something that Aquinas and the theological tradition before Descartes reserved for the afterlife. In Spinoza's account of intuitive cognition and intellectual love of God, as Carriero argues, we see a secular version of this theological tradition. See Carriero 2014, 20–23. I discuss this in a longer essay ("Perfecting Nature: Descartes and Spinoza on the Highest Good"; in progress), from which part of the material in sections 1 and 3 of the present chapter is taken. I there suggest that we can see this as what Descartes retains from the Aristotelian ideal of intellectual contemplation—his somewhat unorthodox application of this ideal in a theological context.
4 Published in 1649 but outlined two years earlier in correspondence with Elisabeth.
5 Translations, when departing from CMS, are my own.
6 What Descartes tells us here is not very clear. The definition includes not just judgment (understood as assent to clear and distinct perceptions) but mentions also "considering" and "imagining" among the thoughts constituting rational or intellectual emotions. Cf. Kambouchner's chapter in the present volume for discussion.
7 In *The Principles of Philosophy,* Descartes calls them "two modes of thinking" (AT 8A, 17; CSM 1, 204), whereas in *The Passions* they are described as "two principal kinds" (*genres*) of thought, namely on the one hand actions of the soul and on the other passions of the soul (art. 17: AT 11, 342; CSM 1, 335; cf. Voss 1989, 28).
8 See *Ethics* 2p48–49. The most well-known is his criticism in the Preface of Ethics Part 5.
9 The will as Descartes explains in the Fourth Meditation has these two roles or acts: affirm or deny ideas presented to it by the intellect (judgment); or pursue or avoid what it perceives as good (willing properly). These two aspects are not clearly separated in *The Passions,* and it is not clear if and how exactly they differ according to Descartes other than through their object. For discussion, see John Carriero 2009, esp. 249–54.
10 Spinoza does not mention Descartes but alludes to "the definition given by writers who define love as the 'lover's wish to be united with the object of love (*amorem esse voluntatem amantis se iungendi rei amatae*)" which he says does not express "the essence of love, but a property of love" *(Ethics* III Definition of Affects 6 explicatio).
11 Stephen Voss translates "in volition" in order to stay neutral between different interpretations of what the role of the will is in this context (Voss 1989,

62n19). But given what follows in art 79 and art 80 Descartes does not seem to make any difference between *vouloir* and *de volonté* (AT XI 387; CSM 1, 356).

12 The definition given in *The Passions* is in fact preceded by that of wonder (*admiration*) with its derivatives (esteem and contempt) which are untypical passions in not being concerned with good or evil and are not accompanied by the usual changes in the movements of the blood and heart, but which are primary in the sense of being included as elements in all other passions (art. 53–56: AT 11, 373–74, CSM 1, 350; art.70–71: AT 11, 380–81; CSM 1, 353).

13 Art. 28: AT 11, 350; CSM 1, 339; cf. references given in Voss 1989, 34. See also Spinoza's characterization of affections as "conclusions without premises" (*Ethics* 2p28d) and of passive affects as confused ideas (Ethics III General Definition of Affects C, 542).

14 I say ideally, because it appears that many considerations other than rational appraisals may bring us to love something, i.e. to unite ourselves de volonté with the thing loved. Think of the example Descartes gives in his next letter to Chanut (6 June 1647) from his own experience about his first love for a girl his age with squinting eyes. The impression of squinting eyes had so associated itself with the motions of love that he found himself disposed, later in life, to love any person with this defect, just because the impression of their squinting eyes set the animal spirits in his neural system moving in certain patterns arousing the emotion. See AT 5, 56–57; CSMK, 322. For an interesting discussion, see Williston 1997.

15 Cf. André Gombay who suggests that "assent" (Latin *assensio*) or "consent" (French *consentement*) in Descartes's account of love can be understood in modern terms as "to be committed", and who proposes that we understand what Descartes calls will as a "faculty of commitment". See Gombay 2007, 89–90 and subsequent discussion.

16 "[T]he principal effect of all the passions of human beings (*de l'homme*) is that they incite (*incite*) and dispose their soul to will the things for which they prepare their body: so that the feeling (*sentiment*) of fear incites it to will to flee, and that of courage to will to fight, and similarly with the others" (art. 40: AT 11, 359; CSM 1, 343; Voss 1989, 40–41).

17 Of the two main genera of thought Descartes has distinguished, the will, i.e., its action or volitions, "are absolutely in its power and can only indirectly be changed by the body. . . . And the whole action of the soul consists in that by merely willing something, it makes the little gland to which it is closely joined move in the way required to produce the effects corresponding to this volition" (AT 11, 359; CSM 1, 343) It is not, as Rodis-Lewis notes, that all our thoughts are in our power, but if anything is in our power, some of our thoughts are, namely those that depend directly on its own actions. Cf. *Discourse* AT VI, 25, To Mersenne 3 dec 1640 AT III 249, and to Christina 20 nov. 1647: "[T]here remains only our will, which is absolutely within our disposal" (AT V 83, CSMK 325). See Rodis-Lewis 2010, 129.

18 Here Descartes relies on a traditional view of love as having perfection as its true object (AT 4, 291–92; CSMK, 265). Yet what he here says about love can be seen as anticipating the definition given in the letter to Chanut. See AT 4, 293; CSMK, 266.

19 For recent discussions of Descartes's notion of the self and love see Brown 2006, chs. 6 and 8, 2014; Shapiro 2013; Alanen 2014, Forthcoming.

20 Cf. Frigo 2016, Section III.

21 For a helpful discussion of this, see Svensson 2015.

22 "From all this it is obvious that our love for God should be, beyond compari-

son, the greatest and most perfect of all our loves" (AT 4, 611–12; CSMK, 311). Is it possible though, for a finite imperfect being to enter into a union with God, thinking of God as belonging to one's self? Or is it rather a matter of joy at discovering oneself as belonging too—or as being dependent on—God? Rejoicing at the idea of God as the highest good and of oneself as being created in God's image? Cf. below section 5.

23 The passions generally have this natural function, which is to "dispose our soul to will (*vouloir*) the things which nature decrees (*dicte*) to be useful for us, and to persist in this volition" (art. 52: AT 11, 372; CSM 1, 349).

24 As soon as "the soul judges an object worthy of it", this makes "the heart disposed to the motions which excite the passion of love; and when the heart is similarly disposed by other causes, that makes the soul imagine lovable qualities in objects in which, at another time, it would see nothing but faults." (AT 4, 603; CSMK, 307) Cf. Kambouchner 2008.

25 "I think that the soul's first passion was joy, because it is not credible that the soul was put into the body at a time when the body was not in a good condition; and a good condition of the body naturally gives us joy. I say that love followed because the matter of our body being in constant flux (*s'écoulant sans cesse*) like the water in a stream, there is always need for new matter to replace it, so that it is scarcely likely that the body would have been in good condition unless there were nearby some matter suitable for food. The soul, uniting itself willingly to that new matter, felt love for it; and later, if the food happened to be lacking, it felt sadness. And if its place were taken by some other matter unsuitable as food for the body, it felt hatred" (AT 4, 605; CSMK, 307–08). Brad Inwood, in conversation, reminds me about how this first passion for nourishment, in the Stoic theory, set the soul on the wrong course tying it to contingent goods. On the special connection between joy and love in Descartes' account, see Denis Kambouchner's contribution to this volume.

26 Desire, which is future oriented, can take these two forms as the other emotions: it can be caused by a rational judgment of value (appraisal) or by confused thoughts induced by external stimulation and bodily movements. Cf. art.91–92 in *The Passions of the Soul*.

27 One should be careful with the term 'movements of will' here which are *not* passions (AT 4, 602; CSMK, 306). What Descartes calls movements of the will are purely rational emotions or acts of the soul, i.e., clear and distinct thoughts/beliefs about the good whereby the soul instantly joins itself to it. They are, as we saw, distinct both from the movements causing and accompanying the passions which occur mechanically in the body, as well as from the desires or inclinations these might cause.

28 For an argument that love is what unites the soul with the body, see Shapiro 2003.

29 Cf. Letter to Elisabeth May 21, 1643: AT 3, 665; CSMK 3 218. Cf. *Principles* Part One art. 48, AT 9B 22; CSM 1, 208–09,

30 "It is composed of things that are substances but is not itself a substance".

31 The function of passions being, as we saw, to "dispose our soul to want (*vouloir*) the things which nature deems useful for us, and to persist in this volition" (AT 11, 372; CSM 1, 372). While "the passions are all good by nature", they have a tendency to exaggerate the value or importance of their object, so "we have nothing to avoid but their misuse or their excess" (AT 11, 485; CSM 1, 403).

32 The text quoted, in my reading, expresses and summarizes what I would call Descartes's "Spinozistic moment". But the last quote could perhaps also be read differently. Descartes may claim here merely that it is the idea of the union itself, i.e. of uniting oneself to something infinite that causes the affect

here. I owe thanks to Daniel Moran and Julia Borcherding for pressing this point (Yale, April 2017). This is a natural reading that would not necessarily commit Descartes to the kind of Spinozism as my reading suggests. The idea of the infinite for Descartes is a positive idea of which we have a direct intuitive grasp- that is the idea of God as object of intellectual love. The question that Descartes has to answer here, however, is how this intellectual love could incite and be supported also by the passion of love caused through the body. For that, according to his psychology of emotions, the object must be imaginable, which God is not, so Descartes turns his attention to what comes closest to God of all the things falling under the imagination: the infinitely extended nature created by God, a nature of which we qua embodied are parts and can somehow picture. The extended infinite universe here takes the place of God as a divine object of love.

33 Jean-Marie Beyssade proposes this "reconstruction" of a practical syllogism on behalf of the soul experiencing its first emotion of love-one whose accompanying movements are reactualized in all later loves, where "I am my body whose good is my highest good" constitutes the implicit major; while the experience of the fetus is captured in this minor: "The fresh blood (of the mother) is suitable for the body", and the conclusion drawn "Therefore I join my self willingly to this blood" is its first experience of love. See Beyssade 2001, 344.

34 Descartes uses the notion "referring to" (*rapporter à*) in analyzing different perceptions caused by the body and the nerves in these three categories on the basis of what we refer them to: sensory perceptions (light, sound) are said to "refer to objects outside us" (art. 23), bodily sensations (hunger, thirst, natural appetites, pain, heat) are referred to the body (art.24), while passions in the strict sense are perceptions "we refer to (*nous rapportons à*) our soul" (art. 25).

35 For discussion see Brown 2006, 96–104, who defends a different reading, and Hoffman 2009, 263n 16 and n18.

36 For recent discussions, see Gombay 2007, ch. 6; Carriero 2009, ch. 4; Alanen 2013; Brown and Normore Forthcoming, ch. 7.

37 About "purely intellectual joy", see art. 91 (AT 11, 397; CSM 1, 361). Cf. art. 147 (AT 11, 440–1; CSM 1, 381). For an interesting discussion, see the essay of Beyssade referred to above in note 33, and Margaret Wilson's reply (Wilson 1986, 191–5).

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